

Fukushima-is-still-news

- vol. 8 –

Practical Problems For The Japanese Population 2015-2017



Odile Girard



Référence bibliographique

Odile GIRARD, *Practical Problems For The Japanese Population. 2015-2017*, Collection Fukushima-is-still-news, vol. 8, Éditions de Fukushima, 2023, 760 p.

E-book édité par Les Éditions de Fukushima – <http://www.editionsdefukushima.fr/>

ISBN : 978-2-9585975-6-6

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INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

End of March 2019: Time to stop this blog

29 Mars 2019

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

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

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

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

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

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

Odile Girard

Avertissement

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

Le présent volume est le huitième d'une collection de 16 ouvrages qui sont édités petit à petit.

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Fukushima rice under the radiation limit

January 3, 2014

All rice grown in Fukushima pass radiation safety checks for first time

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201501030034>

All bags of rice harvested in Fukushima Prefecture in 2014 submitted for testing met the national standards for radiation, marking the first time that all bags fell within acceptable levels since the checks began in 2012.

Testing for radiation got under way after the March 2011 accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

In 2014, an estimated 10.75 million bags of rice were tested, and all were found to have **less radiation than the national standard of 100 becquerels per kilogram**.

The Fukushima prefectural government began testing all rice grown in the prefecture in 2012 after purchasing about 190 testing devices to be used throughout the prefecture.

In past testing, about 10 million bags of rice were checked annually. In 2012, 71 bags were found to exceed the safety standards, while in 2013, 28 bags were over the standard.

Bags of rice found to have less than the standard set in the Food Sanitation Law receive labels saying that testing has been completed. Bags of rice that exceed the standards are destroyed.

The prefecture plans to continue the radiation testing program.

Rice farmers in Fukushima Prefecture have attempted various methods to reduce the radiation in the rice. One measure involves changing the fertilizer used so that radioactive cesium is not absorbed by the rice plant.

(This article was written by Naoyuki Takahashi and Mana Nagano.)

New school in Futaba, new fancy uniforms

<image: http://img.over-blog-kiwi.com/1/22/53/68/20150105/ob_4bad78_uniforms.jpg>

January 4, 2015

New Fukushima school has uniforms created by AKB48 costume designer

Uniforms by AKB48 designer Shinobu Kayano for the Futaba Future School. (Image courtesy of the Fukushima Prefectural Board of Education)

拡大写真

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/features/news/20150104p2a00m0et001000c.html>

Shinobu Kayano, the woman behind all-girl pop group AKB48's flamboyant costumes, has designed the student uniforms for the Futaba Future School, a combined junior-senior high school set to open in Hirono, Fukushima Prefecture, in April 2015.

The Futaba Future School is **part of local efforts to restore the educational framework for residents of Fukushima Prefecture's Futaba district**, host to the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The school's logo was proposed by award-winning advertising creative director Hiroshi Sasaki, who is also a member of the "Futaba no kyoiku fukko oendan" (Futaba education recovery support group). The uniforms were commissioned by Fukushima Prefecture after AKB48 founding producer Yasushi Akimoto - also a member of the Futaba education group -- introduced Kayano to the project.

The uniforms for both girls and boys are anchored by navy blue, with jacket collars bordered in white. The trousers are a checkered grey pattern, while the skirts are done a green and light blue tartan -- designs intended to "look smart, stylish and elegant." Kayano also used cloth with elastic properties, making sure the uniforms would be comfortable as well as nice to look at.

For the logo, Sasaki transformed the kanji characters for "future" (mirai) into a pattern resembling the complex frame of a building. Swooping around the graphic is "Futaba Future School" in all-caps English, making the entire logo look somewhat like a fuzzy dandelion head. The resemblance is not accidental. The design apparently includes "the desire for the students' academic success to reach the entire world."

The Futaba Future School will have about 120 places, and junior high school students from the Futaba district will be given preferential admission for 70 percent of those spots. The remaining 30 percent will be filled by children from outside Futaba in a single-round application and screening process. Applications will be accepted from Jan. 20-23, 2015, and the entrance exam will be conducted on Feb. 3. Successful applicants will be notified on Feb. 6.

January 04, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Preservation

January 8, 2015

Gutted structure to be preserved as reminder of tsunami devastation

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/quake_tsunami/AJ201501080034

By TORU FURUSHO/ Staff Writer

SENDAI--The shell of a municipal building that stands as a symbol of the devastation caused by the 2011 tsunami disaster is to be taken over by the Miyagi prefectural government with an eye on preservation. The 12-meter-high three-story disaster-management center building in Minami-Sanriku's coastal Shizugawa district was gutted by waves of up to 15.5 m after the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake struck.

Forty-three residents and town employees were swept away.

The building withstood the onslaught, but was stripped bare with only its skeletal structure remaining. It became a site of mourning for many people.

However, the town government struggled to keep up with maintenance costs and decided in September 2013 to dismantle the structure.

Minami-Sanriku residents are divided over the building's fate. Some believe it should be left as it is so future generations understand the extent of devastation, while others say the mere sight of it brings back painful memories.

To address these concerns, the prefectural government held a meeting of an advisory council in December to discuss preservation of other sites as well.

The council concluded that the structure had become "well-known around the world as a symbol of the disaster," and that it was on par in terms of symbolic power with the Hiroshima Peace Memorial, or Atomic Bomb Dome. It recommended that the Miyagi prefectural government undertake its management. The prefectural government decided to preserve the building on behalf of the town government out of consideration for survivors, as well as the economic strains faced by Minami-Sanriku. The town government is expected to accept its decision.

As public opinion remains divided on whether or not to permanently preserve the structure, the prefectural government will manage the building until 2031, the 20th anniversary of the disaster, before making a final decision on the fate of the structure.

The prefectural government's decision reflects similar delays that affected the Atomic Bomb Dome, now a UNESCO World Heritage site. The Hiroshima city council made its final decision to preserve the structure only in 1966, 21 years after the city was leveled in the atomic bombing.

Evacuee speaking

January 7, 2015

Japan Political Pulse: Insight from a Fukushima evacuee

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20150107p2a00m0na003000c.html>

What does reconstruction and recovery from the Fukushima nuclear disaster mean? Late last year, I visited a man in his 60s living in a temporary housing facility in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Koriyama. He spoke to me about the needs that are covered neither by compensation payments nor by the government's reconstruction budget, the failure of politicians to fill in that gap, and his anger toward misguided criticisms of Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) and the government.

The man lived in the village of Kawauchi located next to Okuma, one of two villages hosting TEPCO's Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

"To be honest, I'm just exhausted," he said. "(After the accident), I just fled, right? But it wasn't like I lived here (in temporary housing) from the beginning. I stayed with relatives, going from place to place. Then I haggled over whether my house in the village was going to be decontaminated or not, and then over where the contaminated soil was going to be temporarily stored. After that, there was controversy over the installation of an incinerator for debris. Now we're arguing over compensation. In all honesty, whether or not to oppose nuclear power is irrelevant to me right now."

Evacuation orders for Kawauchi have been lifted, save for one small section, but only 600 of the 2,700 villagers have returned. When residents who are in the village at least four days a week are included in the tally, the number comes out to about 1,400. The village mayor has expressed enthusiasm for building infrastructure and bringing in private companies to encourage residents to return, but both efforts have

been slow-going. People are still concerned about radiation exposure in the village, the levels of which, according to national guidelines, are within "acceptable" levels.

"The experts all say different things, right? The government might say it's safe, but doctors who've returned to work have left their families behind elsewhere, and some university professors have said publicly that they would never come to Fukushima. That confirms our suspicions," the man said. "As for whether thyroid cancer is increasing, who really knows? I know some people in their 40s and 50s have recently taken tests and received B2 results (the presence of nodes or cysts, indicating a need for further tests), and they've decided to leave the village."

With the lifting of Kawauchi's evacuation order, TEPCO has stopped the monthly 100,000-yen per person compensation payments to village residents. This development has hit the villagers hard, but the man says that the perception that TEPCO is reluctant to compensate victims is mistaken.

"TEPCO is dealing with compensation responsibly," he said. "In fact, many millionaires have emerged as a result of compensation for lost land and businesses. The problem is the difference between the treatment of those who were under government orders to evacuate and those who evacuated of their own accord, even if they suffered similar damage. The issue is what they're going to do about that gap."

"Not everyone in Kawauchi is struggling financially. Some have made lots of money from the reconstruction budget, like those involved in decontamination. I see them driving around in 6-million-yen cars," he continued. "I think it's a good thing that more people are getting richer. What's important now is rebuilding the lives of those of us who don't feel the benefits of compensation payments and the reconstruction budget."

"I think politics is meant to serve people like that, but in real life, politicians rush recklessly toward building infrastructure in the name of the public good. There's very little in terms of benefits for individuals in times of disaster. I think we're at a point where this has to change."

"I don't want you to misunderstand me. I'm not criticizing the government. But I think the government wants to lift all restrictions regardless of whether radiation levels are high, and move forward with preparing for the Olympics (in 2020). The village's senior officials had no choice but to agree to that policy. As a result, the village protected itself, and failed to sufficiently protect its people."

"I hate the mass media. I hardly ever agree to interviews from the Mainichi Shimbun or the Asahi Shimbun. You want to know why? I'm sorry to say this, but the content is really shallow."

What do reconstruction and recovery mean? What is the role of politics? What should be the media's relationship to what's happening? We can find clues in the man's statements. As he was about to leave, I asked him a foolish question: "What's your hope for the new year?" He took a moment to think about it and smiled ironically. "To stay the course, I guess." (By Takao Yamada, Expert Senior Writer)
January 07, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Korea checks safety of marine products

January 9, 2015

Korean food safety inspectors plan second visit to judge marine exports

Kyodo

South Korean food safety inspectors will pay a second visit to Japan next week before deciding whether to lift a ban on imported marine products, the Foreign Ministry said Friday.

During its four-day inspection, the team of South Korean researchers and consumer representatives will visit wholesale markets in Hokkaido, Aomori and Iwate prefectures to assess radiation inspection procedures for seafood. The visit begins on Tuesday.

A similar delegation in December visited the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant and other locations, requesting additional data on ocean radiation levels, officials at the farm ministry said.

South Korea expanded its import ban in September 2013 to include all fishery products from Fukushima and seven other prefectures due to consumer worries over the toxic radioactive water leaks at the meltdown-stricken plant.

More disaster prevention staff than before 3/11

January 10, 2015

Most prefectures, major cities acquire more disaster-prevention staff after 2011 quake

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150110p2a00m0na014000c.html>

Some 80 percent of prefectural governments and "designated cities," which are granted increased autonomy, have placed more staff in disaster prevention posts since the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. Small municipal governments, on the other hand, are having difficulty securing staff for disaster management, a Mainichi Shimbun survey has found.

The Mainichi Shimbun conducted the survey on disaster-prevention personnel between November and December last year. It asked all 47 prefectural governments, 20 government-designated cities and 139 municipal governments that have been selected by the Cabinet Office as areas that require special tsunami prevention measures for a possible Nankai Trough earthquake how many disaster-prevention staff members they had, both at present and in fiscal 2010, before the Great East Japan Earthquake. It also asked whether they had high-level management posts specializing in disaster prevention.

The survey found 38 prefectural governments including the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and 16 designated cities had increased the number of workers in disaster-prevention positions. The Kyoto Municipal Government increased such posts from 12 to 26, while the Sakai Municipal Government in Osaka Prefecture boosted the number from 10 to 25.

Kyoto increased the number of disaster management staff at ward offices to improve local-level disaster prevention measures, while the Sakai government said it had reviewed local anti-disaster plans preparing for a Nankai Trough earthquake. The Shimane Prefectural Government, which increased posts for disaster management by 1.6 times, said the increase was to counter a possible nuclear disaster.

The number of disaster prevention staff was cut at nine local governments, including the Aomori Prefectural Government, but only slightly. At least one prefectural government explained that it transferred authority over anti-disaster measures to municipal governments.

The overall number of disaster prevention staff at prefectural governments and designated cities increased from 2,489 before the March 2011 quake to 2,943 in 2014 -- a rise of 18 percent. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, the number of personnel at those local governments

dropped by 3 percent, from 367,048 to 354,663, in the same period, highlighting local governments' shift of personnel to reinforce disaster prevention measures.

A total of 139 municipal governments have been designated as special tsunami prevention areas. Of the 134 that responded to the survey, 63 had increased the number of disaster-prevention staff. At the same time, 37 local governments had no staff specializing in disaster management.

Itsuki Nakabayashi, a specially appointed professor at Meiji University's graduate school, says local governments should educate staff in disaster prevention by sending them to training sessions held by the central government.

January 10, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Coming-of Age Day for Fukushima evacuees

January 12, 2015

Fukushima evacuees pledge to rebuild communities on Coming-of-Age Day

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201501120041>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

IWAKI, Fukushima Prefecture--Outside of their hometowns and a day earlier than usual, hundreds of evacuees in Fukushima Prefecture celebrated Coming-of-Age Day with the nuclear disaster still looming large in their thoughts.

The evacuees, who have turned 20 or will do so over the next three months, had their later teenage years shaped largely by the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

They are entering adulthood with the nuclear disaster still unresolved and reconstruction efforts blocked by high radiation levels.

"We face many issues, and the rebuilding effort will take many years," Okuma Mayor Toshitsuna Watanabe said in a speech to 101 celebrants. "It is important to continue to hold passion and hope."

The Coming-of-Age Day ceremony was held Jan. 11 at a hotel in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, about 40 kilometers south of Okuma, a now-deserted town that hosts the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Although Jan. 12 is the national holiday, seven cities, towns and villages in Fukushima Prefecture that have some parts of their jurisdiction designated as evacuation zones because of the nuclear accident held their ceremonies in the middle of the three-day weekend to make it easier for evacuees to attend.

Some of the local governments were also forced to hold the ceremonies outside of their jurisdictions.

Yota Watanabe, 20, who works in the taxation section of the Okuma town government, attended the ceremony in Iwaki.

Watanabe was in his first year of senior high school when the Great East Japan Earthquake struck. He began working at the Okuma government in spring 2014.

"I wanted to work on behalf of the town because it is my birthplace," Watanabe said.

He took the mayor's words to heart because he knows how busy the town government is in dealing with the problems and attention from the nuclear accident.

After the ceremony, Watanabe talked about the lengthy process of decommissioning the reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

"I will fulfill my responsibility as a town government employee to see that process to completion over the next 40 years," he said.

All residents of Tomioka, a town directly south of Okuma, are also still living in evacuation. The town held its Coming-of-Age Day ceremony in Koriyama, where the Tomioka government has set up temporary offices. The ceremony was attended by 156 people.

Homes in Tomioka that were destroyed by the 2011 quake and tsunami remain untouched because high radiation levels are preventing any reconstruction work.

"I want to become an adult who can contribute to rebuilding my hometown," said Masato Kujiraoka, 20, who is studying architecture at university.

For the ceremony, Kujiraoka resuscitated a band with junior high school classmates for the first time in five years. The band had played at the junior high school cultural festival.

On Jan. 11, band members performed the same song they did five years ago, a tune by the popular group flumpool. That stirred nostalgia among some participants who were hearing it again.

(This article was written by Yoshitaka Ito and Naoyuki Takahashi.)

Second group lawsuit over Fukushima disaster

January 13, 2015

Group files fresh complaint over Fukushima nuclear disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150113p2g00m0dm077000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- A group of citizens including some from Fukushima Prefecture on Tuesday filed a second criminal complaint against a former nuclear safety official and eight others, arguing they failed to take necessary preventive measures in the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

It follows one filed in June 2012 against Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s then Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata and others for causing the disaster at the utility's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant in March 2011.

Among the accused this time were Yoshinori Moriyama, a former official in charge of nuclear disaster countermeasures at the now-defunct Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, officials at TEPCO and others. In the written complaint filed with the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office, **the group said the nine were responsible for a number of citizens' exposure to radiation in the Fukushima crisis by neglecting to take countermeasures for possible severe accidents.**

The prosecutors' office is continuing its investigation into the first case after an independent judicial panel of citizens decided last year that Katsumata and two other TEPCO officials merit indictment in the wake of the prosecutors' decision not to indict them.

Remembrance

January 15, 2015

Tsunami-hit patrol car to be preserved

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Nuclear & Energy

Jan. 15, 2015 - Updated 13:45 UTC+1

A town in northeastern Japan is moving to preserve a patrol car hit by the March 2011 tsunami in order to pass on the memory of the disaster to future generations.

Two officers in the car were guiding residents of Tomioka Town in Fukushima Prefecture to safety when tsunami triggered by the massive earthquake struck. One officer died and the other is still missing.

The damaged car was originally to be disposed of as waste. But the town decided last month to preserve it in response to requests from local residents.

On Thursday, town officials, residents, and police officers gathered in front of the car and observed a moment of silence.

Then the car was checked for radiation levels and its inside was cleaned before being transported on a truck to an automobile factory for washing and rust-proofing treatment.

The car will be placed at a park near the town's police station in early March.

Dai Fujita is one of the residents who submitted petitions to have the car preserved. He said he wanted it preserved in the need to remember the mission of the 2 officers and their thoughts. He said it's good to have a prayer site for both their families and fellow officers who come to Tomioka Town from other parts of the country to offer help.

Transportation of radioactive waste will have to wait (2)

January 16, 2015

Govt. delays transportation of radioactive waste

Jan. 16, 2015 - Updated 09:21 UTC+1

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Japan's government has decided to delay the start of moving radioactive waste created by the Fukushima nuclear accident to intermediate storage facilities.

Environment Minister Yoshio Mochiduki said on Friday that the ministry had given up its initial plan to begin the work by the end of January.

Mochiduki expressed hope to start the work by March 11th, the 4th anniversary of the earthquake and tsunami that led to the nuclear accident.

He said the government has to ask local authorities and residents to keep waste at temporary storage sites for several more years because it's impossible to transport the large amount of waste all at once.

The government has chosen a 16-square-kilometer area straddling Futaba and Okuma towns in Fukushima Prefecture for the facilities. But the project has made little progress.

Radioactive soil and other waste stemming from decontamination work have been kept at **1,037 sites in 53 out of 59 municipalities in the prefecture.**

75,000 other locations, including private property and parking lots, are also used as temporary storage sites.

Fukushima Governor Masao Uchibori said the intermediate facilities are a huge nuisance for local communities, but essential for the reconstruction of his prefecture.

He urged the central government to answer the prefecture's request to ensure safety during transportation of contaminated waste.

The governor added that he will deal with the matter by taking into account the public's wish to get rid of the waste and the troubles the intermediate storage facilities bring to the host municipalities.

Gov't to postpone moving radioactive waste to interim storage sites

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150116p2g00m0dm075000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Environment Minister Yoshio Mochizuki said Friday the government has given up its plan to begin this month transporting radioactively contaminated soil and other waste, collected during decontamination work following the 2011 Fukushima nuclear crisis, to interim storage sites at nearby towns.

The government now aims to begin such transportation by March 11 this year on the fourth anniversary of the disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station, Environment Ministry officials said. The delay was due to difficulties obtaining agreement from residents near the interim storage sites and local municipalities, the officials said.

Under the government plan, the radioactively contaminated waste will be kept in the interim facilities in the towns of Futaba and Okuma in Fukushima Prefecture and will be permanently disposed of outside the prefecture within 30 years, as requested by the Fukushima prefectural government in accepting the storage.

The site for final disposal of the radioactive waste has yet to be decided.

Meanwhile, Reconstruction Minister Wataru Takeshita offered an apology over the delay.

In October 2011, the government led by then Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda released the target to begin the delivery of contaminated waste to interim storage sites in January 2015.

METI proposes reducing buying price of solar energy

January 16, 2015

METI eyes lowering solar energy buying rate under feed-in tariff system

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150116p2a00m0na012000c.html>

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) has proposed lowering the buying rate of solar power but maintaining the prices of other renewable energy at current rates under the feed-in tariff system in fiscal 2015. METI advanced the proposal during a meeting of experts on the system under which utilities are obliged to buy all clean energy at fixed rates.

The system is coming under scrutiny because an unexpectedly large number of new suppliers have entered the solar power business, triggering fears that Kyushu Electric Power Co. and other utilities may face a shortage of capacity to accept such energy leading to blackouts.

The focus now is on how much the panel on assessing procurement prices would lower the price of photovoltaically-generated electricity as it addresses the issue of curbing the costs needed to purchase the electricity on top of electricity prices. METI will set the buying prices of solar and other renewable energy for fiscal 2015 sometime in March after getting the results of the panel's findings.

The buying rate of electricity under the feed-in tariff system is calculated by adding certain profits to power generation costs. But the government has set the buying rate at high levels over the first three-year period following the launch of the system to promote renewable energy in the aftermath of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami and subsequent Fukushima nuclear disaster. During the panel's meeting on Jan. 15, METI proposed scrapping the plus profit scheme for corporate solar energy and lowering the price after July this year when the feed-in tariff system marks its third anniversary.

However, METI plans to promote wind, geothermal and other renewable sources at a profit. No such profit is added to photovoltaic power generation for ordinary housing.

METI, citing lower operating costs for photovoltaic power generation, proposed reducing the buying price. **But it proposed keeping the current buying prices for other renewable energy sources,** saying there are too few examples of power generation through such sources and there is not enough data to warrant a review of their operations.

Since the introduction of the feed-in tariff system in July 2012, the government has sanctioned 73.49 million kilowatts of renewable energy through November last year, with solar energy accounting for more than 90 percent of the total. According to METI's projections, annual purchases would amount to nearly 2.702 trillion yen if all sanctioned renewable energy projects start power generation. **Such costs are added to power bills and Japan faces the twin challenges of correcting an overreliance on solar energy and reducing the financial burden on the public.**

Potassium chloride indispensable

January 18, 2015

All 2014 Fukushima rice cleared radiation tests, thanks to fertilizer

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/01/18/national/all-2014-fukushima-rice-cleared-radiation-tests-thanks-to-fertilizer/#.VLt1uy51Cos>

Fukushima Minpo

For the first time since the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 plant throttled the agriculture-reliant prefecture, all rice produced there last year cleared the required radiation tests.

Fukushima Prefectural Government last year checked every bag of rice produced in the prefecture — some 10.75 million bags — based on the Food Sanitation Law, which bans the sale of rice radiating more than 100 becquerels of cesium per kilogram.

The tests found that all bags checked from January 2014 through December 2014 exhibited lower than standard radiation levels, in contrast with the bags produced in 2012 and 2013, which contained a small percentage of tainted rice unfit for shipment, the prefectural government said.

Officials said they hope the results will help raise consumer confidence in Fukushima rice, which was devastated by the nuclear disaster. **Experts attribute the achievement to efforts to prevent cesium from making its way into rice fields during cultivation, and to the use of fertilizers based on potassium chloride, which prevents the grain from absorbing the radioactive isotope.**

The tests, introduced in 2012, screen bags of rice as they move on a conveyor belt. Bags sniffed out by the initial screening are tested further with precision instruments. Bags over the 100-becquerel cesium limit are discarded.

In 2012, a total of 10.35 million bags were tested and 71, or 0.0007 percent, failed to pass the testing criteria.

In 2013, the failure rate was reduced to just 28 bags, or 0.0003 percent of the 11 million bags tested.

In 2014, 29 bags were flagged as suspicious by initial screening but later found to be below the cesium threshold.

Given that 867 bags were weeded out by initial scans in 2012, the 2014 results represent a major advance, they said.

To date, the rice farmers, prefectural government and local JA cooperatives have made joint efforts to promote fertilizers based on potassium chloride, which prevents rice from absorbing cesium.

The prefecture is shouldering all costs for the fertilizers. In 2014, it distributed ¥1.61 billion in subsidies to farmers to buy enough potassium chloride-based fertilizer to treat 68,000 hectares of paddies.

Research has shown that putting potassium in soil prevents rice from taking in cesium. **But it is important to keep the potassium levels high while rice is young. Thus, the prefecture and JA cooperatives have advised rice farmers to keep adding the chemical.**

Keisuke Nemoto, a professor at the University of Tokyo's Laboratory of Crop Ecology and Morphology who is studying how radioactive cesium makes its way into rice, said the 2014 test results represent the fruit of the joint effort.

But Nemoto said his experiments showed that rice grown in paddies last year without potassium-based fertilizers still breaks the 100-becquerel cesium limit.

"Unless farmers keep adding potassium to soil every year, the chemical's density in soil will decline and rice could start absorbing cesium again," he warned.

This section, appearing every third Monday, focuses on topics and issues covered by the Fukushima Minpo, the largest newspaper in Fukushima Prefecture. The original article was published January 9.

For Fukushima citizens, an outrageous decision

January 22, 2015

Prosecutors not to indict ex-TEPCO execs again over Fukushima nuclear disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150122p2a00m0na001000c.html>

The Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office is set to decide soon not to indict three former executives of Tokyo Electric Power Co., including then Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata, on charges of professional negligence resulting in death and injury over the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, it has been learned. In September 2013, Tokyo prosecutors made their initial decision not to file charges against three former TEPCO executives, including 74-year-old Katsumata. But investigators at the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office are currently reinvestigating the three former TEPCO executives after a judicial panel of citizens decided last July that the three should be indicted.

Sources said that prosecutors will make a formal decision soon not to indict them after experts on tsunami, plant engineering and other fields explained in the reinvestigation process that there was little they could do. "There is a high possibility that even if they had taken anti-tsunami measures, they would not have been able to prevent the accident," said the experts.

Following prosecutors' latest decision, the Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution is to re-examine the case. If the committee decides again that the three men should be indicted, the Tokyo District Court will pick lawyers to serve as prosecutors and file an indictment against the three.

In 2008, TEPCO estimated that a tsunami as high as 15.7 meters could hit the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. After its initial investigation, the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office decided not to indict the three men, saying, "The estimate was based on the severest conditions and it is difficult to acknowledge that it was possible to predict the accident."

In response to prosecutors' decision, the Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution decided in July 2014 that the three men should be indicted, arguing that they could have avoided or mitigated the accident if they had taken steps such as: installing switch boards and power generators on higher ground; and making buildings waterproof.

In its reinvestigation of the case, the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office interviewed experts on tsunami, plant engineering and other fields in addition to the former TEPCO executives. Prosecutors have apparently come to a conclusion that it is highly possible that even if the aforementioned anti-disaster measures had been taken, the damage caused by tsunami could not have been avoided.

Fukushima citizens group expresses outrage

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150122_33.html

Jan. 22, 2015 - Updated 13:12 UTC+1

The leader of a group of citizens from Fukushima and other areas has expressed outrage over the prosecutors' decision not to indict the former officials.

Ruiko Muto leads the group that filed the criminal complaint.

Muto said at a news conference on Thursday that the prosecutors' decision totally ignores the judgment by the inquest panel, which she said served to express opinions of the public.

She said the victims of the accident sincerely hope that justice will be served concerning those responsible for the accident.

The group's lawyer Hiroyuki Kawai said it's unreasonable that the prosecutors decided not to indict the 3 even though they had done nothing to prepare for a tsunami.

Kawai said the group hopes the panel will decide to indict the former officials so that they will be held accountable.

Complaint against ex-TEPCO officials again dropped

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150122_31.html

Jan. 22, 2015 - Updated 12:09 UTC+1

Prosecutors have again dismissed a criminal complaint against 3 former executives of Tokyo Electric Power Company over the 2011 nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

Tokyo prosecutors made the decision following a reinvestigation into the case in response to a judgment by a prosecutor inquest panel last July.

The judiciary panel at that time said the utility's former chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata and 2 others should stand trial over their handling of the accident.

That's despite prosecutors' initial conclusion 2 years ago that it would be difficult to indict the 3 former executives.

In the reinvestigation, prosecutors have been hearing from experts on nuclear engineering and tsunami. They did not change their decision.

The prosecutors explained that Tokyo Electric in 2008 estimated the effect of a tsunami as high as the one that hit in 2011. But they said that since reactor buildings were submerged in water several times deeper than they'd estimated, it's hard to say the executives should have predicted the risk.

The case now automatically goes back to the inquest panel. If it repeats its judgment, the 3 former officials will have to stand trial according to judicial procedures.

New bus service through no-go zone

January 23, 2015

R East to run bus service through Fukushima no-entry zone

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201501230057>



Train services resume June 1 between Tatsuta and Hirono stations on the JR Joban Line. Temporary storage sites for contaminated soil and other waste are seen along the tracks. (Asahi Shimbun file photo)

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

East Japan Railway Co. (JR East) will start a bus service on Jan. 31 that runs through an area with high radiation levels near the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, officials said Jan. 22.

The service, operated by JR East's Mito branch, will be the first public transportation in the "difficult-to-return zone," the government-designated area where evacuees will not be allowed to return home at least until March 2017.

The route will connect Tatsuta Station in the town of Naraha and Haranomachi Station in Minami-Soma on the JR Joban Line. Train services between the stations have been suspended since the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the nuclear disaster in March 2011.

As an alternative to the suspended rail operations, the bus service will cover a 46-kilometer north-south stretch of National Route No. 6, according to the JR East Mito office. The section through the difficult-to-return zone will be 14 km.

Last summer, members of the Cabinet Office's team in charge of assisting the lives of disaster victims measured radiation levels along the 46-km route.

When they moved at speeds of 40 kph, they were exposed to about 1.2 microsieverts of radiation in an hour, according to the team.

The bus will run once in the morning and once in the afternoon in both directions with no stops along the route. The trip between Tatsuta and Haranomachi stations is estimated to take about one hour.

The difficult-to-return zone includes areas of the towns of Futaba and Okuma, which jointly host the Fukushima No. 1 power plant.

Evangelion producer to set up studio in Fukushima Pref.

January 20, 2015

Evangelion' producer to open anime studio, museum in rural Fukushima

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201501200074>

By NAOYUKI TAKAHASHI/ Staff Writer

KORIYAMA, Fukushima Prefecture--Gainax Co., the anime company best known for the hit series "Evangelion," is setting up a studio in Miharu to help draw people back to this rural area still reeling from the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and nuclear disaster.

Executives of the Tokyo-based production company and officials from the town government signed a business agreement to establish the studio and a museum at a ceremony on Jan. 19 in the neighboring city of Koriyama.

"We hope to contribute to Fukushima's reconstruction even by a little by transmitting information and producing content from Fukushima to the world," said Yoshinori Asao, the president of the company's new subsidiary anime production company, Fukushima Gainax, at a news conference.

Under the agreement, the studio and museum in Miharu will be established in April.

The studio will be located in the former Sakura Junior High School, which closed in fiscal 2012 due to the declining number of young people. Fukushima Gainax will rent the building from the municipal government.

The company plans to hire around 30 staff members from local communities and elsewhere to work on projects such as the film "Uru in Blue," which will hit screens worldwide in 2018.

In the museum to be built next to the studio, visitors will be able to learn about the process behind anime production. The facility aims to attract 30,000 visitors annually by holding anime-themed exhibits and events that will invite voice actors as guests.

Asao, originally from Fukushima city, came up with the idea to establish the studio in the prefecture in autumn 2013 to "bring back the local children, and the upbeat mood they bring, even just a little."

He was inspired by news reports that local economies in the area were in ruins, and that children who were evacuated from the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant still had not returned.

Gainax decided on Miharu for the studio because the town is close to Fukushima Airport and JR Koriyama Station, where the Tohoku Shinkansen makes regular stops. The well-preserved condition of the school building was also a contributing factor.

"Once again, no indictments"

January 23, 2015

Once again, no indictments against former TEPCO execs over Fukushima disaster

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Prosecutors again decided not to indict three former executives of Tokyo Electric Power Co. over the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, essentially saying that the disaster was unpreventable. The Jan. 22 decision by the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office rejected the stance of an independent judicial panel of citizens that former TEPCO Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata and two former vice presidents, Sakae Muto and Ichiro Takekuro, should be indicted on charges of professional negligence resulting in death and injury.

The citizens panel, called the Tokyo No. 5 Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution, plans to re-examine the case. If it again decides that charges are warranted, the three former TEPCO executives will be indicted mandatorily and stand trial.

A group of residents, disaster victims and lawyers initially filed a criminal complaint against the former TEPCO executives, saying the company failed to take appropriate measures against the tsunami that hammered the plant and caused the meltdown after the March 11 Great East Japan Earthquake. But prosecutors decided not to indict them in September 2013, saying experts did not predict an earthquake and tsunami of the scale of the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake and subsequent waves.

The group took the case to the citizens panel.

In July 2014, the panel concluded that TEPCO had in fact predicted a tsunami as high as 15.7 meters based on a government organization's forecast in 2008. The panel said that if the utility had taken measures based on that prediction, it could have prevented the nuclear disaster. It concluded that the three former executives should be indicted.

Prosecutors reinvestigated the case and solicited opinions from other experts.

While acknowledging the prediction of a 15.7-meter-high tsunami, prosecutors said the reliability of the forecast was low because it was based on calculation methods that were not officially recognized in those days.

Prosecutors also said the probability of the Fukushima plant being hit by a 15.7-meter-high tsunami was "once in a million years to 10 million years."

"It cannot be said that it was a duty for TEPCO to take measures (against tsunami of that height)," the prosecutors office said.

The tsunami that inundated the Fukushima plant was 11.5 meters to 15.5 meters high.

However, prosecutors said the width of the tsunami was five times longer than the width predicted by TEPCO. Therefore, the utility could not have prepared for such a huge volume of water at the nuclear plant, they said.

"It cannot be said that TEPCO could have predicted a tsunami (of such a large scale)," the office said.

They also addressed the citizens panel's assertion that measures taken against a 15.7-meter-high tsunami could have prevented the nuclear accident.

They concluded that even if TEPCO had started constructing sea walls in response to the 2008 prediction, they would not have been completed by March 2011.

If TEPCO had taken waterproofing measures for the reactor buildings, the equipment would have been destroyed by rubble thrown about by the tsunami.

"It is difficult to recognize that the nuclear accident could have been prevented," the prosecutors office said.

Members of the group that filed the initial complaint expressed outrage.

"It is an unfair judgment with a foregone conclusion," one of the members said at a news conference in Tokyo. "We hope the citizens panel will again decide that the three should be indicted and stand trial." Group members plan to submit to the panel a report about why they are opposed to the prosecutors' latest decision.

Growing obesity problems

January 24, 2015

Obesity a growing problem among children in Fukushima

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201501240044>

By YUKIHITO TAKAHAMA/ Staff Writer

Fears that playing outdoors will risk radiation exposure, and other lifestyle changes brought on by the 2011 nuclear crisis, are being blamed for a rise in obesity among youngsters in Fukushima Prefecture. An education ministry survey released Jan. 23 calculated the percentage of children on a prefectural basis whose body weight is at least 20 percent heavier than normal.

It carries out the nationwide survey each year by randomly choosing children between the ages of 5 and 17 attending kindergartens, elementary, junior high and high schools.

The latest survey for fiscal 2014 found that 15.07 percent of 9-year-olds in Fukushima Prefecture were 20 percent or more heavier than normal. The figure was much higher than the national average of 8.14 percent, and the highest among all 47 prefectures.

The corresponding figure in Fukushima Prefecture was also the highest among all prefectures for 7-year-olds, 11-year-olds and 13-year-olds.

For 17-year-olds, the figure in Fukushima Prefecture was 13.11 percent, much higher than the 9.48 percent national average and the second highest among all prefectures.

According to the ministry, obese children are most commonly found in the Tohoku region, where winter snow tends to keep youngsters inside.

However, the trend has been especially acute in Fukushima Prefecture since the 2011 onset of the nuclear crisis spawned by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

The ministry said this appeared to be because children in Fukushima Prefecture are restricted from playing outdoors due to radiation fears and other associated lifestyle changes.

It is currently engaged in improving physical education. "(However), it will take time until its effects appear," a ministry official said.

Nuclear Watch: Paving the Way Home

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclearwatch/20150121.html>

Paving the Way Home

Cleanup crew have been working to decontaminate the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant for nearly 4 years. Thanks to their efforts, some evacuees have been able to return to their hometowns nearby. But it's not easy for former residents to pick up and start over. For one, job opportunities remain limited. NHK WORLD's Yuki Hidaka visited one returning resident who is trying to solve this problem.

Tomoyuki Wada was born and raised in Odaka, Fukushima Prefecture, less than 20 kilometers from the site of the nuclear accident.

The area is now open to residents only during the daytime. Government officials aim to make it safe to live there again by April of next year.

Wada says it's necessary to create jobs before then, so that people can restart their lives there as soon as they return. He travels to Odaka during the daytime to revive local businesses.

"People will return if they know there are shops and jobs available in the area," he says. "By gradually creating an inflow of residents, the town will regain its energy and that will positively impact people's daily lives."

Wada has revived the local silk farming and textile industries. Investments have been kept to a minimum by using existing resources. Four locals now work at the facility. All of the products are hand-made. "Time flies when I'm working at my job. I think this kind of work suits me" says employee Shizuka Kume.

The company is planning to increase the number of silkworms by tenfold over the next few months. Even though silk farming and textile production are small industries, they are essential for the community to thrive," Wada says.

Wada also opened a restaurant last month. He used a vacant facility owned by one of his friends.

Dozens of people showed up on opening day. Wada hopes the eatery will play a role in rebuilding ties within the community that have come close to being severed. One customer remarked that the restaurant gives the community what it really needs a place to gather.

Wada employs 4 Odaka residents at the restaurant, which is open for lunch 4 days a week.

"I hope that the silk farming and textile production businesses, as well as the restaurant, become profitable as soon as possible," Wada says. He aims to expand them after the government lifts the restrictions in Odaka. He hopes to help turn his hometown into a place where people are happy to live once more.

Tohoku: A "land kept as a colony for a millennium"

This is a relatively old article but the comments are still valid and interesting

INTERVIEW: Anthropologist says Tohoku region must gain independence from Tokyo

August 01, 2014

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/opinion/AJ201408010006>

By YUZURU TSUBOI/ Staff Writer

After seeing the rebuilding efforts for the devastation wrought by the triple disaster in March 2011, anthropologist Norio Akasaka said he wondered if the Tohoku region would remain a "colony of Tokyo."

The 61-year-old Gakushuin University professor, who is also director of the Fukushima Museum in Aizu-Wakamatsu, has long promoted regional developments through cross-disciplinary studies of Tohoku. The rebuilding projects, he said in a recent interview with The Asahi Shimbun, have unveiled an antiquated mind-set that the Tohoku people must depend on the capital.

But Akasaka said the Tohoku region actually has a chance to attain economic and psychological independence--and serve as a role model for all Japanese in **adapting to the demographic and environmental changes facing the nation.**

Excerpts from the interview follow:

I have advocated the development of “Tohoku studies” for the past quarter century to deepen our knowledge of the region’s culture, history and climatic characteristics, and turn them into resources for regional development. I have walked across the region on my own feet.

Based on what I saw, it was my understanding that Tohoku has fully grown into a richer region. Indeed, the government’s Reconstruction Design Council in response to the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, in which I served as a member, lauded Tohoku as a “manufacturing hub” in Japan.

But I have learned that the reality is different. For instance, in a tsunami-stricken municipality, the operator of an auto-parts factory is forced to work for an hourly payment of 300 yen (\$2.94), well below the minimum wage.

Under that system, the factory can earn 2,000 yen by producing an auto part in an hour, but it actually takes an entire day to manufacture it. That means the wage level for the operator is as low as 300 yen per hour.

The municipal government made serious efforts to attract the plant to its area. While nobody is willing to acknowledge it, however, the factory is actually on the bottom end of a chain of subcontractors and is forced to compete with its counterparts in developing countries around Asia.

Nuclear power plants are more explicit symbols of the “colonial” rule. The Fukushima nuclear disaster has raised a fundamental question as to why Fukushima Prefecture had to host a nuclear power plant that supplies electricity to Tokyo.

I was surprised when people related to the nuclear industry said Tokyo Electric Power Co. has colonies in Tohoku. They meant that TEPCO’s nuclear power plants are all located in Fukushima and Niigata prefectures, outside the region that they supply electricity to.

Tohoku people sarcastically express anger toward the roles the region played before World War II, saying, “men make soldiers, women make prostitutes and farmers make rice” in Tohoku to be supplied to the rest of the country.

Since the end of the war, Tohoku has supplied “electricity, industrial components and rice,” but its economic subordination to Tokyo and other regions apparently continues today.

Countries around the world have been trying to survive the era of globalization by allowing widening disparity within their peoples and regions. Their survival hinges on how they can sacrifice the exploited people within national boundaries.

I believe Tohoku and Tokyo are rebuilding a relationship of structural dominance and exploitation in line with this reality.

Nagao Nishikawa, professor emeritus of comparative cultural studies at Ritsumeikan University, who died last year, caught on the structural woe of globalization, calling it “colonialism without colonies.”

During the campaign to bring the 2020 Olympic Games to Tokyo, the president of the bid committee emphasized Fukushima’s recovery but bluntly added that Tokyo is safe because it is 250 kilometers away from Fukushima. To his eyes, Tohoku is a remote and peripheral region.

But it is utterly heartless to use Fukushima's tragedy to draw compassion from the rest of the world and then sideline it to give Tokyo the Olympics. Or is that what politics is all about?

Since it was conquered by (legendary general) Sakanoue no Tamuramaro (758-811), forces from Tohoku have lost all decisive battles against forces from other regions.

Its subordinate position in the interregional hierarchy was reinforced in the early modern era with the loss of pro-Tokugawa Shogunate domains in Tohoku in the Boshin War (1868-1869). Tohoku has unique history as a **"land kept as a colony for a millennium."**

RECOVERY NOT FOR TOHOKU

Recovery projects that have been under way in tsunami-stricken areas are also Tokyo-oriented.

The disaster effectively advanced the clock by 20 years; today's Tohoku is much like what it can be two decades later when depopulation and aging will become much more serious problems.

We needed wisdom to rebuild Tohoku into a region that can serve as a model for all Japanese in the future when the population shrinks by one-third to around 80 million 50 years from now.

But what is now under way are antiquated public works projects, **as if politicians, bureaucrats and businesses are all rushing to protect vested interests in the name of recovery efforts.**

The people affected by the disaster have generally given their silent approval to such projects, underscoring the weakness of the regional economy and people's mentality--a result of decades of dependence on central government subsidies.

Local governments also lack the imagination and strength to draw future scenarios in the era of depopulation. That is why they are building gigantic concrete tide walls to block in their towns and public housing complexes, which are destined to become like ghost towns as depopulation continues.

In a nutshell, the state, local governments and residents all lack the vision to use recovery projects to create ideal communities.

On March 11, 2011, the tsunami flooded rice fields in coastal areas, turning them into seas of mud. But these rice fields were created on reclaimed lagoons.

Our ancestors divided common-property lagoons and wetlands into personal properties and cultivated the land to produce farm crops to supply to the increasing population in the modern era.

But since the population is set to decline, we should simply let devastated coastal lands return to lagoons. They can attract tourists and become models for environmental reclamation projects.

I wonder whose benefit it will serve to reclaim rice fields that were destined to be abandoned sooner or later--even before the March 11 disaster--with the costs subsidized by the central government.

Debate is now needed to find a realistic answer on how we can lead safe and sustainable lives in the future.

We must review our lives and livelihoods from scratch to redesign our future. In doing so, it is important to listen carefully to voices of young people, especially women.

Wind, solar, geothermal and other renewable energies are the leading technologies of our civilization and co-products of the local natural environment and technology.

If people can produce electricity from these energy sources, we can regain control over our lives.

For example, micro-hydro power generation requires local residents to restore limpid rivers and streams. To keep our rivers clean, we must restore mountain forests, which were our primary source of energy in the past.

Through actively participating in the energy cycle, we can also give serious consideration to the idea of community autonomy and independence, and we support these ideals.

Residents in the Aizu region of Fukushima Prefecture have already taken action to realize such ideals. Our motto is that we are restarting the freedom and people's rights movement seen in the Meiji Era (1868-1912).

The prefecture served as a central base for the movement. And residents in the Sanriku coastal area in Iwate Prefecture have also shown a self-governing ability through their successful campaign to oppose construction of a nuclear power plant.

The "colony for a millennium" may not be able to win over other regions, but it has a toughness not to surrender completely.

Dismantling work at Fukushima station

January 27, 2015

R East begins dismantling deserted railway station near Fukushima plant

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201501270040>

By NAOYUKI TAKAHASHI/ Staff Writer

TOMIOKA, Fukushima Prefecture--Workers have begun tearing down structures at a train station here that was devastated in the deadly tsunami of 2011, citing the danger of collapse they pose to the growing number of visitors to the site.

The removal work got under way Jan. 13 on the JR Joban Line's Tomioka Station as East Japan Railway Co. (JR East) workers were seen removing the station's collapsing platform roofs. JR East's Mito branch said an overpass at the station will be taken down by the end of March.

According to the railway operator, the dismantling work is necessary to protect the increasing number of visitors to the collapsing structures who see the ruins as a symbol of the triple disaster, involving the quake, tsunami and nuclear accident.

On March 11, 2011, the Tomioka Station building was swept away by the tsunami that struck northeastern Japan. Located within a 20-kilometer radius of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the central government designated the entire town of Tomioka as an evacuation zone.

In March 2013, after entry to most parts of the town became permissible during the day, curious visitors from across Japan began visiting the ruins of Tomioka Station, which was overrun with high grass and weeds, and had collapsing platform roofs.

Because of the nuclear disaster, the section of the JR Joban Line between Tatsuta and Haranomachi stations, which runs through Tomioka Station, has been closed to train services. JR East said decontamination work will be conducted along the route to pave the way for eventual reconstruction.

The railway added that the base of a train platform and the rail tracks will remain. A time frame for the resumption of railway services has yet to be determined.

"It is sad that I can no longer see a train station that I used to use daily," said Masato Kujiraoka, a 20-year-old college student who was evacuated from Tomioka. "I hope a train will one day return to my hometown."

With an eye toward preserving the memories of the Great East Japan Earthquake for future generations, Tomioka town officials have requested that JR East provide them with items that were once part of the station, such as the Tomioka Station sign.

One way to find money

January 27, 2015

Kansai Electric aims to cut retirement benefits, in bid to raise prices again

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/01/27/business/corporate-business/kansai-electric-aims-cut-retirement-benefits-bid-raise-prices/#.VMiffS51Cot>

JJI

OSAKA – Kansai Electric Power Co. has asked its labor union to accept cuts in retirement allowances as the firm tries to repair its balance sheet, according to informed sources.

The utility also asked Monday for the union to agree to a **suspension in housing allowances from fiscal 2015**.

The company hopes the cost-cutting moves will help it secure government approval for another hike in domestic power prices, the sources said.

Reduced retirement benefits would affect around 18,000 rank-and-file employees. After reaching an agreement with the union, the company plans to apply the cuts also to some 2,700 employees in managerial posts, the sources said.

Specifically, the company plans to review its retirement benefits system from fiscal 2015 by raising the proportion of defined-contribution pension funds that are managed by employees, the sources said. The employees would get lower retirement allowances if investments underperform.

In May 2013, Kansai Electric raised its electricity rates for households by 9.75 percent on average. In exchange for the hike, the company conducted a 60 percent cut in executive pay, reduced monthly salaries of employees by 5 percent and skipped their bonuses.

The company's earnings deteriorated further last year as the nation's fleet of commercial nuclear plants remained idle, which forced it to incur imported fossil fuel costs. **In December, it applied for government approval for another full-scale household electricity rate hike of 10.23 percent.**

Kansai Electric has already imposed another 5 percent cut in executive pay, but it faces pressure to cut costs further.

Hokkaido Electric Power Co., which faces a similar situation, hiked its household electricity rates again last November, becoming the first power supplier to conduct a second full-scale hike since the 2011 triple meltdown at Tepco's Fukushima No. 1 plant.

Fishermen want to be included in TEPCO's decisions

January 27, 2015

Fishers submit request over TEPCO wastewater plan

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Jan. 27, 2015 - Updated 11:21 UTC+1

Japanese fishers have demanded that the operator of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant gain their understanding before releasing decontaminated water into the sea.

The head of a national federation of fisheries cooperatives, Hiroshi Kishi, submitted the request to industry minister Yoichi Miyazawa on Tuesday.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority last week released a plan to discharge decontaminated water below government standards into the nearby Pacific from 2017 or later. The measure is aimed at reducing the amount of water stored in tanks at the plant's compound.

Tokyo Electric Power Company is operating wastewater treatment systems called ALPS to remove most radioactive substances, resulting in a huge number of storage tanks in the compound.

The fishers' federation says the plan is deplorable and strongly requests that the operator not release the water without the understanding of the fishers and others.

Miyazawa said there's no change to the policy of gaining local approval in carrying out measures against wastewater and not allowing easy release.

After the talks, **Kishi said he was relieved to hear the minister's remarks. He stressed that at the moment fishers do not approve the idea of releasing decontaminated water even if it meets government standards. He added that he wants the nuclear regulators as well to know that.**

Ambassadors promote Fukushima foods

January 29, 2015

Foreign envoys sample Fukushima delicacies to promote exports

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201501290065>

By KEIICHIRO INOUE/ Staff Writer

Ambassadors of four Commonwealth nations tucked into rice balls and other tasty morsels from Fukushima at an event in Tokyo to show support for food from the disaster-stricken prefecture. The Jan. 27 event was organized by the farm ministry to raise attention to efforts to resuscitate the local economy and promote exports of Fukushima goods, which have remained stagnant since the nuclear accident triggered by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster in northeastern Japan.

The food tasting was hosted by Fukushima Governor Masao Uchibori in a store specializing in foods from Fukushima Prefecture.

He was joined by Mark Sinclair, Bruce Miller, Mackenzie Clugston and Tim Hitchens, respectively the ambassadors of New Zealand, Australia, Canada and Britain, at Nihonbashi Fukushima-kan Midette in Chuo Ward.

Also on hand were Koya Nishikawa, the minister of agriculture, forestry and fisheries, and Wataru Takeshita, the reconstruction minister.

The envoys were served "onigiri" rice balls made from grain harvested in the prefecture and beef, washed down with locally-produced "ginjo" premium sake.

Nihonbashi Fukushima-kan Midette opened last April with the aim of countering fears about the safety of food products from Fukushima Prefecture in the aftermath of the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

"It's a shame that the locals are still suffering four years after the nuclear disaster," Sinclair said. "I want to keep supporting them."

New Zealand, Australia and Canada had lifted import restrictions on products from Fukushima Prefecture by January 2014, based on measurements of radioactive material. Britain allows imports as long as a government-issued radioactive material inspection certificate is submitted.

However, agricultural products produced in Fukushima Prefecture are still widely shunned in overseas markets.

Agricultural exports from the prefecture amounted to 153 tons in fiscal 2010. But in fiscal 2011, which started in April that year or just a few weeks after the disaster, the total dipped to 17 tons.

Fears about radioactivity continued to affect the prefecture's exports, with the total for fiscal 2012 plunging to 2 tons. Although the situation showed some improvement during the past fiscal year, the total amount of agricultural exports remains at around 5 tons.

Twelve nations and regions, including Fukushima Prefecture's former key export destinations of Hong Kong, Taiwan and China, still fully or partially ban imports of foods from the prefecture.

"The amount we can export is limited, even to countries that allow imports, and business negotiations for each export case takes a lot of time," said a prefectural government official.

Prefectural authorities, meantime, are trying to expand exports to Southeast Asia as part of a new strategy.

In fiscal 2012, peaches and apples were exported to Thailand for the first time after the nuclear disaster. Fruit from Fukushima was also exported to Malaysia in fiscal 2013.

In August, 300 kilograms of the coveted "Koshihikari" brand rice grown in the prefecture sold out at a luxury food store in Singapore.

Fukushima heno Omoi

January 29, 2015

Actress Yoshinaga to release CD of poems by Fukushima victims on 4th anniversary

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201501290003>

By HIDEKI SOEJIMA/ Staff Writer

When famed actress Sayuri Yoshinaga visited Katsurao in Fukushima Prefecture late last year, she came away shaken.

"I went there because I was afraid that I would not be able to grasp the whole scope of the sorrow of the stricken people without going there myself," Yoshinaga said of the village, part of which is designated a zone where residents cannot return for several years due to the high radiation levels.

"It was more shocking than I had imagined. After all these four years, things remain the same as in the immediate aftermath of the disaster."

In March, Yoshinaga will release a CD in which she reads an anthology of poems composed by victims of the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Sales of the CD, titled "Daini Gakusho--Fukushima heno Omoi" (The second chapter--Thoughts on Fukushima), will begin on March 11, the fourth anniversary of the onset of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

"I am hoping that (the CD) will prompt people to think about the displaced people in Fukushima Prefecture and remain aware of their plight," Yoshinaga, 69, said during an interview earlier this month.

The popular actress decided to record the CD because she believes Japanese should "not forget, not let the memories fade away and not treat it as if nothing had ever happened," just like the catastrophes suffered in Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Okinawa during World War II.

Born in 1945, the year Japan surrendered after experiencing two atomic bombings, Yoshinaga has made it her life's mission to produce CDs of poem readings in a campaign against war and nuclear weapons.

She began reciting poems at a gathering for the cause in 1986. Her latest CD follows "Daini Gakusho" (The second chapter), a 1997 CD on the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, and "Daini Gakusho--Nagasaki kara" (The second chapter--From Nagasaki), which was released in 1999.

She also produced "Daini Gakusho--Okinawa kara" (The second chapter--From Okinawa), a 2006 CD on the theme of the 1945 Battle of Okinawa, the only battle fought on Japanese soil involving civilians.

Speaking of the same title that connects these works, she said, "We are in the second chapter, not the first chapter, since five decades have passed since the end of the war.

"I want to pass down the memory (of the war) to future generations not in a loud voice, but in a gentle tone," she said.

After the nation was struck by the nuclear accident, triggered by the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, **Yoshinaga took up reading poems composed by people affected by the disaster.**

Among these are works by Ryoichi Wago, a poet and teacher from the prefectural capital of Fukushima who continued posting his poems on Twitter after experiencing the earthquake, and by Shigeko Sato, a poet who fled her home in Tomioka, a town close to the beleaguered plant.

Yoshinaga expressed doubts about the wisdom of relying on nuclear power in a country such as Japan.

"After the Fukushima disaster, I strongly believe that Japan should not return to nuclear power generation in this small, quake-prone country," she said. "We must make more and more efforts to ensure that we can live in a safe environment."

Her new CD comprises 23 poems. Yoshinaga selected them from a shortlist of about 300, including those composed by Wago's students.

Dozan Fujiwara, 42, a shakuhachi bamboo flute performer, provided the background music at her request.

The CD jacket picture was done by Kazuo Oga, an art director who had been involved in many works of anime production house Studio Ghibli. The CD will be released by JVC Kenwood Victor Entertainment Corp.

Yoshinaga is scheduled to read the poems from the CD at Tsuda Hall in Tokyo's Sendagaya district on March 10. For more information on the gathering, call the Japan Traditional Cultures Foundation at 03-3222-4155.

Store reopens in Nahara

January 30, 2015

Convenience store reopens near disaster-hit Fukushima plant

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150130p2g00m0dm035000c.html>

IWAKI, Japan (Kyodo) -- FamilyMart Co., one of Japan's major convenience store chain operators, reopened Friday a store in the town of Naraha, most of which remains designated as evacuation zones following the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster.

The store located along a national highway on the Pacific coast was closed after the outbreak of the nuclear crisis. It is now open 24 hours a day to meet the demand of evacuees making temporary visits to their homes and workers engaged in reconstruction work.

Most of Naraha is within the 20-kilometer radius of the disaster-hit plant. More than 7,000 residents of the town were evacuated to other areas after the crisis, but the municipal government and some citizens aim to return to the town in the spring following the completion of radioactive decontamination work there.

A large number of residents and workers visited the store which reopened at 10 a.m. Friday.

Among them, Hideko Morimoto, 67, who was evacuated to the city of Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, said she is able to return to her home in Naraha due to the reopening of the store which she said offers a large number of products, including vegetables.

Tomoe Murao, 57, who operates the convenience store with her husband, said she wants to contribute to helping the evacuees from Naraha to return.

January 30, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Preparing for mass return (to Nahara)

January 30, 2015

Officials resume lives in radiation-hit town in hope of paving way for mass return

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201501300010>

By HIROKI ITO/ Staff Writer

NARAHARA, Fukushima Prefecture--When Hiroshi Aoki boarded the first train of the day on a recent morning here, he was the only passenger.

Almost all of the town's 7,500 residents remain evacuated nearly four years after the outbreak of the crisis at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011, like 72,500 others from the affected localities.

Aoki, 59, is among **four senior officials at the Naraha town government, including Mayor Yukihide Matsumoto, who returned to the town in December to live after obtaining a special permit from the central government and local authorities.**

The officials aim at making it possible for residents to return to their homes as early as spring. Naraha, which has an estimated annual radiation dose of 20 millisieverts or lower, is expected to be among the first of the localities affected by the nuclear fallout that its residents will likely be allowed to return home to live.

They decided to move back after residents urged them at gatherings to do so, to pave the way for the mass return. Many evacuees are anxious about moving back due to fears about radiation. The group is tasked with working out preparations for the town hall based on its findings.

When the nuclear crisis unfolded, most of the town was designated as part of the no-entry zone, a 20-kilometer radius around the beleaguered nuclear station.

Although a ban on entry to the town was lifted in August 2012, **residents are still prohibited from staying overnight, except for special occasions such as the Bon summer season and the New Year's holiday.**

Aoki, who heads a section that devises anti-radiation measures, lives with his 57-year-old wife, Hiromi, at their home not far from the town government building. He is usually stationed at Naraha town hall.

On that day in December, he took the train to Iwaki, where the makeshift Naraha town government has been operating since the mass evacuation. Train service from the town resumed only in June 2014.

Decontamination of the town by the central government was completed in March that year.

Aoki and his wife did not have much trouble restarting their life, as their home was spared from damage in the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake, as well as an outbreak of rats that affected a number of homes.

Aoki said one thing that struck him about the town was how dark it looked at night. The only lights are street lamps and those of the odd vehicle passing through.

Some town employees reported seeing wild boars in the pitch dark on their way back from work.

"It's no wonder people are wary of returning," Aoki said.

In a survey conducted in October, a combined 45.7 percent of Naraha evacuees said they were willing to return "immediately" or "when the conditions are right." The figure was up 5.5 percentage points from the previous poll last January.

A total of 22.9 percent of the respondents in the October poll said they would not return, down 1.3 points.

Most people who said they will return when conditions are right cited the restoration of infrastructure, including roads and hospitals.

Aoki believes leisure facilities should also be revived as early as possible to persuade people to move back to their communities.

Before the nuclear crisis, the town's baseball stadium was always lit up at night, with many people playing a game there or practicing.

Aoki himself had a daily routine of playing tennis after work.

"I am afraid people are not considering moving back to Naraha unless we reassure them that they will be able to engage in leisure activities as they did before the nuclear disaster."

About 20 town employees, including Aoki, now work in the town hall. Most of them commute to the town to oversee the storage of radioactive debris from cleanup work since operations were transferred to the Naraha town hall from Iwaki.

The remaining senior officials are expected to join the four when their homes become habitable again. The town government is expected to present details of their plan for the mass return at meetings with residents inside and outside the prefecture starting this month.

24-hour store and bus service: All set

January 31, 2015

Around-the-clock convenience store reopens in Fukushima restricted zone

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201501310033>



By HIROKI ITO/ Staff Writer

NARAHARA, Fukushima Prefecture--A 24-hour convenience store has reopened in this small town, even though the former residents are still not allowed to stay overnight due to concerns over radioactive contamination.

FamilyMart's Kamishigeoka outlet servicing the community of Naraha resumed operation on Jan. 30. The store was forced to close on March 12, 2011, as the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant unfolded.

"We want to do our best to help the residents of Naraha return home," said Tomoe Murao, the 57-year-old manager of the store.

Residents of Naraha, with a population of 7,500, are expected to start returning this spring.

Supermarkets and convenience stores are also operating in Naraha and Namie, a town to the north where residents are also restricted on the time they spend there, according to prefectural authorities.

The Kamishigeoka outlet is the first to return to around-the-clock operations after store employees gained permission to move back into the town.

The store, which is located on National Route No. 6, expects to stay busy at night with trade brought in by workers involved in decommissioning the crippled nuclear power plant some 14 kilometers away.

January 31, 2015

1st bus service starts through Fukushima no-entry zone

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201501310050>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

MINAMI-SOMA, Fukushima Prefecture--Public transportation has finally returned to an evacuation zone close to the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, with a bus route that runs through an area with high radiation levels.

East Japan Railway Co. (JR East) started the temporary bus service Jan. 31 that operates in the government-designated "difficult-to-return zone," where evacuees will not be allowed to return home until at least March 2017.

The 46-kilometer route connects Haranomachi Station in Minami-Soma and Tatsuta Station in the town of Naraha on the JR Joban Line.

Train services between the stations have been suspended since the nuclear disaster set off by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

Before the first bus departed Haranomachi Station at 6:50 a.m., Minami-Soma Mayor Katsunobu Sakurai presented a bouquet of flowers to the driver.

"Although the railway line is still discontinued, today is a memorable day in that the operation of the Joban Line is effectively restored," Sakurai said. "The bus service gives much needed hope for local residents."

The mayor has requested that JR East restore the train service as soon as possible and operate the bus service as a stopgap measure.

The bus operates two round trip services daily, once in the morning and once in the afternoon, with no stops along the route. The trip between Tatsuta and Haranomachi stations takes about one hour.

The difficult-to-return zone includes areas of the towns of Futaba and Okuma, which jointly host the stricken nuclear facility.

Thirty-one passengers, including Minami-Soma residents who were visiting their relatives' homes in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, boarded the first bus, which arrived at Tatsuta Station at 8:15 a.m.

A 62-year-old company executive from Hitachi, Ibaraki Prefecture, who now works at a factory in Minami-Soma, said it previously took six hours to travel between the two cities by taking roadways that circumvent the evacuation zone.

"I appreciate that I now have more options," he said. "But hopefully, they will increase the number of services each day."

Bus service starts in Fukushima evacuation zone

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Jan. 31, 2015 - Updated 06:13 UTC+1

A Japanese railway operator has started temporary bus service inside an area designated an evacuation zone due to the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. Trains in the area remains suspended due to damage from the earthquake and tsunami in 2011.

East Japan Railway Company held a ceremony on Saturday before the inaugural bus left at a stop near JR Haranomachi Station in Minamisoma City.

Mayor Katsunobu Sakurai said the opening of public transportation gives hope to local residents, although they still need to wait the resumption of railway service.

The first bus left at 6:50 AM for JR Tatsuta Station in Naraha town, carrying about 30 passengers.

The bus travels nonstop between the 2 stations twice a day. The route is about 46 kilometers.

The operator says the radiation exposure dose during a test operation was between 0.1 and 1.0 micro-sieverts each way.

Local governments say they hope that residents use the service to return home in the evacuation zone and to travel to the Tokyo metropolitan area.

Promotion of robots to speed people's return

February 2, 2015

Robot development zone planned for Fukushima to accelerate residents' return

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201502020046>

By NORIYOSHI OHTSUKI/ Senior Staff Writer

A special economic zone will be set up in Fukushima Prefecture to promote the development of robots that the central government hopes will speed the return of residents to the region, heavily impacted by the nuclear crisis.

Wataru Takeshita, state minister in charge of reconstruction, made the announcement on Feb. 1 during a meeting of officials from the central government and the prefecture to discuss the recovery from the Fukushima nuclear disaster, which was triggered by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. According to Takeshita, the latest plan to establish a robot development base in the prefecture will be included in the draft revision of the Law on Special Measures for Fukushima Reconstruction and Revitalization. The amendment bill is expected to be introduced during the current Diet session.

Under the plan, robot-related companies and research institutions that will expand to the special zone can purchase land at a lower cost and be eligible for subsidies and tax breaks. All types of robotic development will be eligible for the incentives.

The Fukushima Innovation Coast plan, approved by the Abe Cabinet last year, stipulated that the central government would establish a development center for robots designed to help in the decommissioning of the crippled reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

But concerns were raised by local officials and residents that the planned economic zone focusing on decommissioning would not lead to more residents returning to Fukushima Prefecture, so the Abe administration has changed course.

On Feb. 1, Takeshita also said the central government will include in the draft revision measures to ease the anxiety of residents about the effects of radiation on their health and to remove wild boars that are damaging vacant homes.

"It is estimated that it will take 30 to 40 years to decommission the reactors at the Fukushima plant," Takeshita said at a news conference. "The state has to show how to revitalize the prefecture after the 10-year post-quake reconstruction period."

TEPCO: Compensation in hotspot area

February 3, 2015

TEPCO agrees to pay compensation for property damage in radiation 'hotspot' area

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150203p2a00m0na008000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, has agreed to pay some 420 million yen in compensation for property damage to residents who live in a radiation "hotspot" area, the Mainichi Shimbun has learned.

Fifty-two residents of 10 households living in parts of Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, which is designated as a recommended special evacuation zone due to radiation hotspots, and another nine people of one household in a neighboring district sought compensation from TEPCO over property damage via an alternative dispute resolution process.

Attorneys representing the residents told the Mainichi Shimbun on Feb. 2 that TEPCO has agreed to pay some 420 million yen, a large portion of the compensation payment recommended by the government-backed dispute resolution center.

However, as the utility refused to pay compensation to the one household which is located outside the recommended evacuation zone, the plaintiffs will not accept the payment until TEPCO agrees to pay everyone who filed the claim.

The dispute resolution center presented a settlement proposal over property damage in the recommended evacuation zones to TEPCO in December last year. It was the first case for the center to accept such a claim filed by a group of residents in those areas.

TEPCO rejected the damage claim filed by the one household (about 10 million yen in compensation), saying that the utility will not handle dispute resolution requests from residents outside the radiation hotspot areas in the same manner as those filed by people living in the recommended evacuation zones.

Flounder OK in Ibaraki waters



February 7, 2015

Shipment ban lifted on all flounder in Ibaraki

Feb. 7, 2015 - Updated 06:29 UTC+1

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150207_16.html

Japanese officials have lifted a ban on the shipment of flounder caught off northern Ibaraki Prefecture for the first time in 3 years. They say the fish has cleared radioactive tests.

The central government ordered the ban for the entire prefecture in April 2012. This was after radioactive cesium exceeding its limit was detected in the catches.

It has since lifted the restriction on many fishing areas. But the ban continued for the fish caught in waters north of Hitachi City, which borders Fukushima Prefecture.

The latest decision means all flounder catches in the prefecture will be cleared for shipment.

Ibaraki prefectural officials have conducted 57 radiation tests since last year. They say no radioactive cesium was detected in 37 of the tests, and the other 20 found that the maximum level of cesium was below one-seventh of the government's limit.

A fisheries official says the prefecture will conduct more tests and will also make efforts to dispel persistent unfounded rumors about the safety of its food.

Taking the initiative to measure radiation

February 8, 2015

Skeptical Fukushima residents monitoring radiation levels in their communities

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201502080025>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

On a recent day in late January, a minicar departed from the Iitate village office in Fukushima Prefecture with stickers attached that said, "We are driving slowly because we are measuring radiation levels." The vehicle, operated by Fukushima Saisei no Kai (Resurrection of Fukushima), a local residents' nonprofit organization, is equipped with GPS and radiation measurement equipment, allowing it to record locations and airborne radiation levels.

"Although the level has decreased considerably from immediately after the Fukushima nuclear accident, it is still high," said Mitsukazu Sugiura, 65, the driver of the vehicle, on Jan. 28.

Distrust of the central government, a need to know to make future plans and a desire to maintain ties with neighbors have led to groups of residents around Fukushima Prefecture taking the initiative to monitor radiation levels on their own.

All of Iitate village, which is divided into 20 districts, has been designated as an evacuation zone.

While the village government measures radiation levels at two locations in each district, it has also commissioned Fukushima Saisei no Kai to conduct more detailed measurements.

The organization's vehicle is driven by village residents who commute from where they have evacuated to, such as Minami-Soma or Fukushima cities.

Twice a month in each district, group members conduct measurements along almost all areas along roads where residents lived.

Average radiation levels for each 100-meter-square area have been posted on the group's website.

The near-term goal of the Iitate village government is to encourage residents to return with the planned lifting in March 2016 of the evacuation order. However, residents cannot erase concerns about radiation effects on their health as well as questions about the possibility of resuming agriculture.

Local farmer Muneo Kanno, 64, established Fukushima Saisei no Kai three months after the March 2011 accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant along with scientists and friends. Kanno felt that scientific data would be needed to decide whether to return to Iitate and resume farming.

"In order to tie it with the resurrection of the community, it will be important to have local residents directly involved," he said.

Residents of the Okubo-Yosouchi district in central Iitate began measuring radiation levels near their homes and in the farm fields from 2013. The catalyst was the monthly meetings that were held for the 14 households in the hamlet that had gone their separate ways after the evacuation order was issued.

At those meetings, residents were curious about the radiation levels. However, some said the central government could not be trusted, so they decided they had to check for themselves what the radiation levels were.

Immediately after the nuclear accident, the residents were slow to evacuate because they were not informed by the central government about the estimated spread of radioactive materials.

Masuo Nagasho, 67, a former village government employee, suggested residents conduct their own measurements.

"The attraction of the village was the people," he said. "What I most regretted was the destruction of ties between people and the life of the community that had led before to working together for festivals and rice planting."

In 2014, the monitoring effort spread to the entire district, which has about 70 households. The measurement has provided the perfect opportunity for residents to maintain their neighborly ties by having lunch together. The meals are provided by a local women's group.

TARGETING WATERS OFF NUCLEAR PLANT

Another citizens' group, Umilabo, has been monitoring radiation levels off the coast of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant since November 2013.

One member, Riken Komatsu, 35, works at a fishcake manufacturing plant in Iwaki. He was born and grew up in the area, but when customers asked about the safety of the fish being used, he could only pass along data collected by Tokyo Electric Power Co., the Fukushima No. 1 plant operator, and the Fukushima prefectural government.

"I wanted to go out into the ocean and pass along data I was certain about," Komatsu said.

He and other fishing enthusiasts began the project to collect soil from the seabed and fish, which were taken to the local aquarium for measurement of the amount of radioactive materials they contained.

In November 2014, 10 flatfish were caught about 1.5 kilometers off the coast from the nuclear power plant. Radioactive materials tend to accumulate in flatfish because it lives near the seabed. Although radioactive cesium was detected in five of the 10 flatfish, the concentration was less than half of the standard in the Food Sanitation Law of 100 becquerels or less per kilogram.

There has been no detection of radioactive materials for almost all of the fish born after the nuclear accident.

In the Oguni neighborhood of Date city's Ryozenmachi district, a resident's group began taking airborne radiation level measurements from six months after the nuclear accident. Data for each 100-meter-square area were listed on a map, and the information has been updated annually since.

"The radiation has no color or smell, but the map has enabled us to see it," said Soyo Sato, 66, who heads the group.

The neighborhood has a mix of households that were designated for evacuation because of high radiation levels as well as those that were not so designated. Residents who were exempt from the designation used the data on the map to argue that there was very little difference in radiation levels with areas designated for evacuation.

That led to a settlement with TEPCO for compensation levels that were close to those offered to residents living in the designated areas.

Hideki Ishii, a project associate professor of landscape architecture at Fukushima University, has provided support for self-monitoring efforts.

"When residents see the actual data for their community that they collected, they will think more seriously about whether people can live there and if the compensation levels offered are appropriate," Ishii said. "It also fosters the ability to not only think about the current situation, but also the future."

(This article was written by Yukiko Seino and Yu Kotsubo.)

Fukushima "Miracle pine"



The "miracle pine tree" stands alone in Minami-Soma, Fukushima Prefecture. (The Asahi Shimbun)

February 9, 2015

Miracle pine' that stood tall in tsunami offers hope for Fukushima residents

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201502090053

By MASAKAZU HONDA/ Staff Writer

MINAMI-SOMA, Fukushima Prefecture--Nearly four years after the towering March 2011 tsunami swept away 70 households and claimed 54 lives in this seashore community, a lone "miracle pine tree" that remained standing continues to inspire local residents.

Chohachi Kanno, who lived on the coast, lost his wife, mother and two children in the tsunami spawned by the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Kanno, 63, often visits the site where his house once stood. Only the foundation remains. As he gazes out to sea, he thinks of his mother, Haruyo, and his son, Takemi, who remain missing.

Kanno says he would have continued working with local volunteer fire brigade members in the search for his family if he had not been ordered to evacuate for two weeks after the nuclear crisis unfurled at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

"It is regrettable for me not to have been able to continue searching," Kanno says.

The massive wave of March 11 swept away all that Kanno held dear, even a beachside pine forest that used to cover a 3-kilometer stretch.

But one pine tree was left standing.

The 25-meter-tall tree, which measures 2 meters in circumference, stands 100 meters north of Kanno's house. He always visits the tree when he returns to the former site of his home.

An arborist said the lone pine tree is suffering from root rot as the result of rising groundwater levels and damage caused by salty seawater.

Local residents are currently doing all they can to save the miracle pine tree, such as digging drainage ditches around it and enriching the soil with bamboo charcoal.

"(The tree) symbolizes hope for reconstruction of the local community," says Kazuo Goga, 74, chairman of the lone pine tree preservation association.

Singing in Hungary about loss

February 10, 2015

Fukushima choir finds audience in Hungary by singing in Hungarian about loss

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201502100013>

By NATSUKI EDOGAWA/ Staff Writer

FUKUSHIMA--A choir that takes inspiration from the Hungarian composer Zoltan Kodaly has found fame in his native land with the release of a documentary featuring the members singing in the local language while images about the Fukushima nuclear disaster are shown.

The hour-long documentary was produced by Hungary's state-run TV broadcaster and aired in the country last November.

One viewer said the film provided an insight into the way people affected by the nuclear catastrophe are struggling to move forward as the fourth anniversary of the March 11, 2011, accident approaches.

The Fukushima Kodaly Choir sings only Hungarian compositions in the documentary, which starts out with footage of tsunami-stricken Iwaki, a coastal city to the south of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, to the gentle tune of "Evening Song" by Kodaly.

The folk song is said to express the essence of the Hungarian soul, one laid bare by numerous conquests over the centuries that gave the country in central Europe a sense of isolation.

Kodaly (1882-1967) is best known internationally as the creator of the Kodaly Method, essentially a set of principles to follow in music education.

The film also features scenes of decontamination work as well as a member of the choir from Minami-Soma, a city along the coast and to the north of the plant, driving along a road piled high with radioactive soil from the cleanup operation. There is also footage of the sun setting, as viewed from makeshift housing where evacuees have been living since they fled from their communities.

In a close-up, one member of the choir describes the agonizing decision to flee even though the government had not formally issued an evacuation order.

"My relationship with many people I know has been severed," the individual says. "I knew many people in our community. It is so frustrating (I had to leave)."

The choir was formed in 1987, mainly by members of a class taught by Miyako Furiya, a music instructor at Fukushima University back then.

The group performs Hungarian choral pieces as well as traditional folk songs from Japan and the Indonesian island of Bali.

After residents fled to makeshift evacuation centers following the nuclear crisis triggered by the earthquake and tsunami, the choir began visiting the shelters to offer encouragement.

One song that choir members suggested singing together was “Furusato” (My country home), a Japanese children’s song.

But few evacuees joined them in singing that song.

“We wanted to put everybody in better spirits by enjoying music through singing together,” Furiya said of the group’s aim. “But it was the one song, more than any other, that drove home to evacuees the loss of their hometown. We realized how thoughtless we were.”

Furiya was determined to convey the reality of Fukushima to a wider audience.

This led her to reach out to Hungarian friends about giving a concert in their country to communicate the suffering of people in Fukushima through songs. The concert went ahead in March 2012.

The first song the choir performed was the one whose title roughly translates as “What are words?” It was composed by Gyorgy Kurtag, who is Hungarian, based on a passage written by an aphasiac poet.

“We could not find right words to convey our suffering despite our determination to get people to understand what was going on in Fukushima Prefecture,” Furiya recalled in picking that particular song.

“Our feeling of helplessness was what we wanted to share (with the audience).”

The concert led to the project to shoot the documentary.

At the end of the film, one of the Hungarian directors involved in the project asks about the significance of remaining in Fukushima Prefecture.

Hiroko Saito, a 53-year-old elementary school teacher who leads the choir, replies: “There is not one person who is not aware that Fukushima Prefecture is contaminated with radiation. People just try not to think about it. What we can do as members of society is not to forget Fukushima and raise children in a way that they can also relate to the distressed people beyond the prefecture.”

Saito added: “Since we experienced the agony of having to leave our hometown, we are now able to have a better understanding of how people are feeling in Hungary, even if it is a country far away from Japan.”

Over 1000 decontaminated home to be demolished

February 12, 2015

1,000 homes being torn down after decontamination

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Feb. 12, 2015 - Updated 10:39 UTC+1

NHK has learned that at least 1,000 homes in Fukushima Prefecture will be demolished -- even after they have been cleaned of radioactive fallout from the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi accident.

Local officials say **that's a waste of time and money**. They call on the government to run the decontamination work more efficiently.

NHK polled officials from 9 Fukushima municipalities where demolition is under way. **Each municipality remains partly or completely evacuated.**

Officials from 3 towns said about 1,080 houses are to be torn down despite being decontaminated as requested by residents. **Naraha Town reports the largest number, around 870.**

Officials say leaking rain and animal intrusions are damaging the homes while residents remain evacuated. They also say many evacuees have given up on returning and found new homes instead.

The government pays for both decontamination and demolition programs in evacuation areas. The Environment Ministry says decontamination takes about 2 weeks and costs about 8,300 dollars on average.

An official says the ministry tried to speed up decontamination work at local governments' requests. He says the ministry will now pursue efficiency as well.

Souvenir mural by Katsuhiro Otomo

February 10, 2015

'Akira' creator hopes airport mural will serve as reminder of 3/11 disaster for children



An original illustration drawn by Katsuhiro Otomo for a large mural to be displayed at Sendai Airport (Provided by the Japan Traffic Culture Association)

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Manga giant Katsuhiro Otomo hopes that a huge mural based on his illustration, to be displayed at Sendai Airport from March, will serve as a powerful reminder of the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, particularly for children.

"(Memories of the Great East Japan Earthquake) are rapidly fading, and children are growing up," the 60-year-old from Tome, Miyagi Prefecture, told The Asahi Shimbun in a recent interview. "I hope they will always remember (what happened)."

Internationally acclaimed as the creator of the sci-fi saga "Akira" and its feature film adaptation, Otomo added that he expects the mural to represent what the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami left for the artist.

"There is something left in our hearts after the disaster," he said. "That something will manifest itself in your work as you do your job in a down-to-earth manner."

The mural, which measures 8.7 meters by 2.8 meters, will show how people relate to nature, even though it often poses a threat to humankind.

During the interview, Otomo also shared his thoughts about the disaster and continuing reconstruction efforts in the Tohoku region.

Excerpts from the interview follow:

* * *

Question: What were you feeling when you were drawing the original illustration?

Otomo: I thought it would be better to give it a story rather than drawing something abstract.

I hope people will stop and look at the relief without passing by it, and ask themselves, "What is it about?" (Memories of the Great East Japan Earthquake) are rapidly fading, and children are growing up. I hope they will always remember (what happened).

If some children have no memory of the disaster, I hope they will ask their parents, "What is this?" and that it will lead to topics like the earthquake and reconstruction.

Q: The composition puts a "warashi" (child) in the center, with Fujin (god of wind) and Raijin (god of thunder) featured on both sides.

A: It is also intended for children to look at it. I wanted to attract their attention by giving it a dramatic feel with the warashi overcoming the rough waves.

The Fujin and Raijin are meant to conjure up images of natural threats. There is no way to beat nature, but there are ways that we can get information to prevent damage from typhoons, earthquakes and other disasters to stay safe. I thought it would be better for us to connect well with nature, which is always by our side.

Because the piece is horizontally long, I put in three essential points--namely the warashi, Fujin and Raijin--so that it would be good enough to serve its purpose as a piece of work when viewers take a sweeping view as they stand by it. I drew the "komainu" (lion-like guardian dogs) that the Fujin and Raijin are riding and the goldfish robot that the warashi is riding for enjoyment.

Q: Where were you at the time of the disaster?

A: I was in Tokyo. Fortunately, I was able to contact my family in my hometown of Tome and confirm that they were all right. But I was still worried and wanted to go there as soon as possible, but it was more than a month later when I could actually get there.

There was no major damage to my family home or its surroundings because it is located in an inland area, but I was shocked when I visited Minami-Sanriku.

The places I had visited since I was an elementary schoolchild on family trips--a place where we used to go to eat sushi--and all the others were completely gone. Rubble was everywhere, and the areas along the coastline were submerged under the sea. I saw a locomotive lying on its side in a spot far away from a park where it had originally been located.

Q: What did you think to do after the disaster?

A: I thought I should do something. But it was no use for me to remove debris piece by piece. I thought hard about what I could do, and hosted an exhibition of my original drawings for charity.

Q: It was held in Tokyo in 2012 and had a good following.

A: Actually, I had been preparing for an exhibition of original drawings to coincide with the release of my second art book. The earthquake took place during that time, so I made an abrupt change to hold the event for charity, hoping that part of the profits would be used to support reconstruction. I also increased the number of original drawings to be put on display to about 3,000.

Q: It will be four years in March since the 2011 disaster. How do you feel about the progress of the reconstruction efforts?

A: It's not making progress at all. At first, everyone (across Japan) was saying, "This is serious," but I feel that we are becoming lazy and our seriousness is fading away. There are a lot of people who are still living in temporary housing units.

Q: In such circumstances, what do you think of the power of manga and anime?

A: I try not to think about it too much. It sounds so light-minded, and I also feel it is going with the flow of the times. It's quite hard. But I think there is something left in our hearts after the disaster. That something will manifest itself in your work as you do your job in a down-to-earth manner. It is more beautiful that way.

Q: Is the mural at Sendai Airport one such work?

A: It's not complete yet, but I hope it will be so. When I saw it in the studio before it was given a paint job, it was very powerful. I want to see it on display at Sendai Airport.

* * *

Measuring 8.7 meters by 2.8 meters, the ceramic mural will be in the first-floor lobby of the International Terminal in March. The Sendai Airport's runways and terminal buildings were deluged with floodwaters from the tsunami spawned by the Great East Japan Earthquake. The project was organized by the Tokyo-based Japan Traffic Culture Association, which continues efforts to donate artwork to airports and railway stations across the country. The mural has been completed at a studio in Atami, Shizuoka Prefecture.

About 10 artisans worked on the mural based on Otomo's design, using 12 tons of clay.

Otomo was born in 1954 in Tome, Miyagi Prefecture. After graduating from Sanuma Senior High School, he went to Tokyo and made his professional debut as a manga artist with "Jusei" (A Gun Report) in 1973. "Akira," which started its run in the Young Magazine weekly manga anthology in 1982, was published in other languages around the world. Otomo directed an animated feature film adaptation of "Akira" in 1988. After the global success of the film, the multifaceted creator expanded his range of creative activities and continued to produce animated films including "Memories" (1995) and "Steamboy" (2004).

Over the years, Otomo's delicate drawing style and unusual compositions have made an impact on Naoki Urasawa and many other manga artists. In 2013, Otomo received the Medal with Purple Ribbon, which is given by the Japanese government to individuals to honor their contributions in academics, arts and sports.

(This article is based on an interview by Sakura Funazaki and Satoshi Kimura.)

New bus service goes through no-go zone

February 15, 2015

New Fukushima bus service broadens options for residents near no-go zones

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/02/15/national/new-fukushima-bus-service-broadens-options-for-residents-near-no-go-zones/#.VOCq8S51Cos>

Fukushima Minpo

Local residents in Fukushima Prefecture saw the return of public transportation on Jan. 31 after East Japan Railway Co. began a bus service that passes through the exclusion zone around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The service, which connects the JR Joban Line's Haranomachi Station in the city of Minamisoma and Tatsuta Station in the town of Naraha in 70 to 85 minutes, uses National Route 6 and other roads. It gives residents another option for travel after 46 km of seaside train tracks in the prefecture were destroyed in the March 11, 2011, disasters.

The Cabinet Office estimates a passenger on the new service will receive around 1.2 microsieverts of radiation per one-way trip, assuming the bus passes the exclusion zone at 40 kph. Drivers will carry dosimeters and, if requested, can inform passengers their radiation exposure levels.

At 5:30 a.m. on Jan. 31, around 30 people lined up at the Haranomachi Station bus terminal for the service. Tomoko Takahashi, a 40-year-old office worker from Minamisoma, said she took the first of two bus services that day to meet her three children, who were evacuated to the prefecture's western city of Minamiaizu as the nuclear catastrophe unfolded.

Takahashi had used a different bus service that passes through the inland city of Fukushima to make her weekly visits, but heavy snow had canceled the service on Jan. 31. "I'm really happy I have more than one option," she said.

Rei Nakagawa, 84, took the new bus service from Tatsuta to teach a koto lesson in the city of Soma. Before the new service became available, he was forced to use a different bus and a train, a trip that took him six hours.

"The new service helps me for sure, but I think it will also help the recovery of the region significantly," Nakagawa said.

Local government officials had long lobbied for the new bus route. Minamisoma Mayor Katsunobu Sakurai took the first bus and also made a return trip between Haranomachi and Tatsuta. "This is great news for the roughly 700 residents of Minamisoma who have been forced to evacuate to the city of Iwaki," he said, adding that he would lobby for an expansion of the twice-daily bus service.

An official at the Minamisoma Tourism Association, meanwhile, expressed hope that the bus route will allow more people to visit the city, including students on school trips.

Restoring the section of rail destroyed in the disasters remains a far-off goal, however.

Shingo Odai, a 62-year-old company executive posted in Haranomachi who rode the bus from the town to his home in Hitachi, Ibaraki Prefecture, voiced hope for a quick recovery of train services. "While the new bus route is welcome, I think it would be even more convenient if we get train services back," Odai said.

This section, appearing every third Monday, focuses on topics and issues covered by the Fukushima Minpo, the largest newspaper in Fukushima Prefecture. The original article was published on Feb. 1.

More funds to speed up recovery

February 17, 2015

Cabinet approves revisions to Fukushima funds

Feb. 17, 2015 - Updated 06:31 UTC+1

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Japan's Cabinet has approved the wider use of funds to speed up recovery of areas in Fukushima Prefecture that were affected by the 2011 nuclear disaster.

The government approved a bill on Tuesday to amend special legislation on funds for reconstruction projects and economic support in Fukushima.

The bill gives tax exemptions on up to about 420,000 dollars in income from the sale of property in areas that will house administrative offices and homes. This is to promote land sales in such key regions.

The bill also allows for spending to build roads and sewer systems in areas that are designated as evacuation zones, in preparation for the return of residents.

Tax benefits will be extended to business owners who return home and resume commercial enterprises. They will be able to write off funds accumulated for capital spending as losses.

Reconstruction Minister Wataru Takeshita said in order to accelerate recovery this revision needs to be enacted before the current fiscal year ends in March.

Aftershock or not ?

February 17, 2015

Two quakes shake Tohoku; small tsunami hits coast

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/02/17/national/tsunami-advisory-issued-6-9-magnitude-quake-hits-iwate/#.VOOP7S51Cos>

JII, Reuters, AFP-JIJI, Staff Report

An earthquake measuring upper-5 on the Japanese seismic intensity scale of 7 shook Aomori Prefecture and other parts of the north on Tuesday afternoon, hours after another temblor triggered a small tsunami.

The second instance did not result in a tsunami alert.

The quake struck at 1:46 p.m. The Japan Meteorological Agency described it as magnitude 5.7, with an epicenter around 50 km off the coast of Iwate Prefecture and 50 km deep.

One of the hardest-hit districts was the town of Hashikami, where upper-5 was recorded. It registered as 5-weak in the village of Fudai in Iwate Prefecture.

There were no reported problems at nuclear plants in the area, Kyodo reported.

Earlier in the day, a small tsunami struck the coast of Iwate Prefecture, with a maximum surge of 20 cm recorded at one location.

The tsunami was triggered by a subsea quake with an estimated magnitude of 6.9. It struck on Tuesday morning about 210 km east of the city of Miyako and 10 km deep, the agency said.

Sirens sounded as residents sought higher ground. The largest tsunami waves were measured between 8:35 a.m. and 9:07 a.m. at a port in the city of Kuji, and a 10-cm surge was recorded in Miyako. A smaller tsunami reached the city of Kamaishi, the agency said.

Evacuation orders were issued for residents in coastal districts of Kuji and the town of Otsuchi, and evacuation advisories for the cities of Ofunato and Rikuzentakata as well as Kamaishi.

The Iwate Prefectural Government reported no damage from the waves.

The quake hit at 8:06 a.m. It measured 4 on the Japanese seismic intensity scale of 7 in Iwate and three other prefectures in Tohoku — Aomori, Akita and Miyagi.

The quake was believed to be an aftershock of the 9.0-magnitude earthquake that hit the Tohoku region on March 11, 2011, the meteorological agency said.

Tohoku Electric Power Co., which operates the Onagawa and Higashidori nuclear plants in nearby Miyagi and Aomori prefectures, said it saw no irregularities at the facilities after the quake.

All 48 of Japan's workable nuclear reactors remain offline after the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami triggered the Fukushima No. 1 plant meltdown disaster.

A spokesman for Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of Fukushima No. 1 and Fukushima No. 2 nuclear plants, said there were no irregularities at the plants. The quake was felt only weakly in the area, he said.

Unlisted Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd. also said there were no irregularities recorded at its nuclear fuel reprocessing facility or other plants in Aomori.

East Japan Railway Co. briefly halted Tohoku Shinkansen bullet trains between Furukawa Station in Miyagi and Shin-Aomori Station in Aomori amid a power failure.

The evacuation instructions and advisories were lifted at 10:20 a.m.

Large areas of the coastline covered by Tuesday's warning were damaged by the 2011 quake and tsunami that killed more than 18,000 people and triggered a nuclear disaster.

Earthquakes are common in Japan, one of the world's most seismically active areas. The nation accounts for about 20 percent of the world's earthquakes of magnitude 6 or greater.

See also :

<http://enenews.com/quake-magnitude-7-hits-northeast-japan-strongest-hit-country-2013-felt-along-entire-pacific-coastline-1000-km-followed-multiple-aftershocks-one-centered-japan-trench-official-event-related>

Japanese coastal towns evacuated as earthquake hits Pacific

Tsunami warning issued by Japan Meteorological Agency as residents of Iwate prefecture are cleared from homes, though no damage or injuries reported



<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/17/japanese-towns-evacuated-earthquake-tsunami-warning>

Evacuations were ordered for towns closest to the coast in Iwate prefecture in Japan early on Tuesday morning after a strong earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 6.9 was recorded off the country's coast.

The Japan Meteorological Agency issued a tsunami warning and Japanese broadcaster NHK warned residents a one metre-high wave was expected to hit the coast of Iwate. The quake was measured at a depth of about six miles and shook much of north-east Japan even being felt in Tokyo, 430 miles away. There were no immediate reports of damage or injuries. The Pacific Tsunami Warning Center in Hawaii said there was no danger of a Pacific-wide tsunami.

NHK later said that small tsunamis of about 10 centimetres were recorded about 45 minutes after the quake hit and warned people to stay away from the shore.

Tohoku Electric Power Co and Tokyo Electric Power Co, both of which operate nearby nuclear plants, reported no irregularities at their facilities after the quake. Unlisted Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd also said there were no irregularities recorded at its nuclear fuel reprocessing facility or other plants in Aomori.

All 48 of Japan's nuclear reactors remain offline after a March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, which triggered the Fukushima nuclear disaster in north-east Japan.

6.7 Earthquake Jolts Northern Japan, Triggers Tsunami Warning

<http://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/6-7-earthquake-jolts-northern-japan-triggers-tsunami-warning-n307196>

TOKYO — A shallow 6.7-magnitude earthquake jolted northern Japan early Tuesday, triggering a tsunami warning and advisories cautioning people to stay away from the coast. The warning and advisories ended later Tuesday.

The quake on Tuesday struck off the coast of Iwate Prefecture, where authorities had issued a tsunami warning and expected 3-foot-high waves. The quake's epicenter was 50 miles north of Miyako and 330 miles north of Tokyo, at a depth of 14 miles, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

No damages or injuries were reported.

Onagawa Nuclear Power Plant in Miyagi Prefecture said there haven't been any disruptions or damage from the quake and bullet trains were running on regular schedules, Japan's NHK television reported. Japan's Meteorological Agency cast the quake as an aftershock of the 9.0 temblor that rocked Japan on March 11, 2011, killing at least 15,800 people and caused the meltdown of three reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant.

"Because the 3/11 earthquake had such a strong impact, and because it's an area where it was affected by the 3/11 Earthquake, we are describing this as an 'aftershock,'" said agency seismologist, Yasuhiro Yoshida.

Japan regularly experiences moderate size earthquakes in the area of the 2011 temblor several times a month, and JMA attributes most of them to the 2011 quake.

USGS wasn't characterizing Tuesday's quake as an aftershock, considering it a separate event.

Quakes in N-E Japan (2)

February 18, 2015

Major quakes hit northeastern Japan, minor tsunami observed

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150217p2g00m0dm018000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Earthquakes with a preliminary magnitude of 6.9 and 5.7 struck the Pacific off northeastern Japan on Tuesday, with slight tidal waves observed in some coastal areas following the first temblor.

The first quake occurred at 8:06 a.m. in the Pacific Ocean about 210 kilometers east of Miyako, Iwate Prefecture, at a depth of around 10 km and registered 4 on the Japanese seismic intensity scale of 7 in parts of Aomori, Iwate, Miyagi and Akita prefectures.

Before a tsunami advisory was lifted later in the morning, a 20-centimeter wave was observed at Kuji port in Iwate roughly an hour later and a 10-cm wave in Miyako, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency. Evacuation orders were temporarily issued in parts of Iwate, including the city of Kuji, for people near the coast. No injuries or damage to buildings from the quake has been reported, according to the government. The second quake, which hit at 1:46 p.m., originated off the Iwate coast at a depth of around 50 km and registered upper 5 in some areas of Aomori and lower 5 in parts of Iwate, but no tsunami warning was issued this time.

The weather agency warned after the first quake that temblors registering 3 or higher on the Japanese intensity scale could occur over the next week or so.

No abnormalities have been observed at the Onagawa nuclear power plant in Miyagi Prefecture and the Higashidori power plant in Aomori Prefecture after the quakes, according to their operator, Tohoku Electric Power Co.

Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd. said it has not experienced anything out of the ordinary at its nuclear fuel reprocessing plant in Rokkasho, Aomori.

A power outage following the first quake temporarily halted service on the Tohoku Shinkansen Line, according to its operator, East Japan Railway Co. The operation of Sanriku Railway Co.'s entire coastal line in Iwate was also suspended temporarily.

The coastal areas of Aomori, Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures were devastated on March 11, 2011, when a magnitude-9.0 earthquake struck the Pacific off the northeastern Japan areas, and caused a massive deadly tsunami.

February 17, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Keeping a 3D record of post-disaster situations

February 18, 2015

3-D project under way to preserve data of disaster-ravaged Fukushima buildings

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/quake_tsunami/AJ201502180067

By YASUO KOJIMA/ Staff Writer

FUKUSHIMA--A university museum and other organizations have launched a project to preserve the images and data of buildings destroyed by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in 3-D for future generations.

The executive committee of the Fukushima earthquake disaster legacy preservation project, a group of eight organizations in Fukushima Prefecture, and Tohoku University Museum are employing 3-D laser scanners and drone-like multicopters to collect data through Feb. 19.

Yojiro Taketani, 62, a member of the executive committee, stressed the importance of recording the structures as the memories of what damage they incurred gradually fade.

“If we keep a record of post-disaster situations that show the magnitude of natural threats and impact on human life, we can make use of the information to help in disaster prevention,” said Taketani, who is also a specialist at Fukushima Museum. “In the future, we want the public to see the records.”

The high-resolution 3-D laser scanners will not only record the shapes of the structures and other details such as their colors, but they will also record their exact locations. The device will record the shape of a structure with hundreds of millions of dots.

Special goggles will be used to view the final product. The 3-D glasses will provide a virtual experience by allowing users to feel like they are walking through the buildings as they were and look wherever they want just by turning their head.

The university museum has already completed collecting data on the Minami-Sanriku town’s disaster prevention management building in Miyagi Prefecture, which was destroyed by tsunami that followed the earthquake on March 11, 2011. It also recorded the Okawa Elementary School in Ishinomaki city in the same prefecture.

On Feb. 16 and 17, the team also collected data, both interior and exterior as well as from above, on the Koyasu Kannondo temple in Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture, which was inundated and destroyed by the tsunami.

Images recorded at the temple include mud-covered dolls, thousands of paper origami cranes and an offertory box, all of which remain as they were following the disaster.

On Feb. 18, the team recorded the structural details of the disaster countermeasures office in Tomioka that was set up immediately after the twin disaster.

The office was abandoned soon after it was established due to the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. Tables, a white board and “onigiri” rice balls remain as they were when the area was evacuated, according to the team.

On Feb. 19, members of the team will scan the Ukedo branch office of the Soma Futaba Fisheries Cooperative in Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, which was damaged by the tsunami.

Invaluable collection

February 22, 2015

Teacher's 50-year hobby key to studying nature in pre-disaster Fukushima

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201502220015



One of the samples gathered by Nobuo Sakurai. Fukushima University currently stores it along with a memo written by him. (Yu Kotsubo)

By YU KOTSUBO/ Staff Writer

FUKUSHIMA--For half a century, Nobuo Sakurai has indulged in his hobby of wandering around eastern Fukushima Prefecture to observe nature and gather samples.

His vast collection of nearly 10,000 samples, rescued from decay after the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident in March 2011, might now be the only specimens left to accurately determine how nature has changed in the prefecture since the triple disaster.

"It can be said that (Sakurai's) samples are the only materials that show the past vegetation of areas affected by the disaster," said Takahide Kurosawa, professor of plant taxonomy at Fukushima University.

"It is necessary to consider a facility to gather, store and show such precious materials in a comprehensive manner."

Photos of nearly 3,000 of Sakurai's samples are on display on the Digital Hyohon-kan (Digital sample museum) website of Shimane University, which has cooperative relations with Fukushima University.

Researchers are studying the actual samples, stored at Fukushima University, to find out how the disaster has affected plants in the prefecture.

Sakurai, now 84, is a former elementary school teacher who has continued to observe plants and animals in the Abukuma-kogen highland and the Hama-dori region, both in the eastern part of Fukushima Prefecture.

He has also gathered specimens, including non-native species, in the southern part of Miyagi Prefecture and northern areas of Ibaraki Prefecture. He is now chairman of the Abukuma Seibutsu Dokokai (Abukuma creature club).

Once, when he visited Tohoku University to ask for the name of a plant he could not identify, a researcher told him, “You should know more than I.”

One of his samples, wrapped in a newspaper from 1982, is a plant with leaves that have browned. Handwriting on a slip of paper identifies the sample as the Asian beaked hazel.

As Sakurai became older, however, he grew worried about how to store and use the samples. He often talked about the problem with his younger brother-in-law, Fukuo Suenaga, 72, secretary-general of the club.

The samples were kept in a space above the garage of Sakurai’s house in Minami-Soma in Fukushima Prefecture.

But after the meltdowns at the nearby Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in 2011, Sakurai’s house became part of a designated no-entry zone, and he was unable to freely return home from a temporary housing facility.

The nuclear disaster also prevented Suenaga from using his house in Namie.

Concerned that insects or mold would deplete or destroy the value of Sakurai’s samples, Suenaga asked an acquaintance, who was an official at the Minamisoma City Museum, for help. Through the museum official, Fukushima University agreed to store the samples.

From March 2012 to May 2013, Sakurai and Suenaga brought the samples to the university in three installments in cooperation with museum staff and university researchers.

In the first two installments, the samples underwent radiation checks because some areas in the garden of Sakurai’s house showed radiation levels exceeding 2 microsieverts per hour.

Sakurai, who still lives in temporary housing, appeared relieved that his 50-year effort would not go to waste.

“If I continue to store the samples, they will only decay,” he said.

The Minamisoma City Museum plans to display the samples to highlight the changes in nature caused by the disaster.

“It is important to convey pre-disaster memories (to future generations),” Suenaga said.

Money donated for orphans unused

February 23, 2015

4 billion yen donated for disaster orphans in Miyagi remains unallocated

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150223p2a00m0na008000c.html>

Around half of the 8.2 billion yen donated to Miyagi Prefecture to help children orphaned by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami has been left unallocated for nearly four years, it has been learned.

Officials have already decided to use some of the money to pay grants to students orphaned by the quake, but this will use up only about half of the donations. The prefectural government plans to find ways to expand its use of the money, but to do so it needs to consider revising an ordinance, and so far has yet to settle on a plan.

In 2011, the Miyagi Prefectural Government passed an ordinance establishing the "Earthquake disaster Miyagi children's education fund" to provide grants to students orphaned by the disaster. As of the end of last year, donations to the fund topped 8.21 billion yen.

The prefecture's fund pays elementary and junior high school students who lost their parents to the disaster 10,000 yen a month, while high school students get 20,000 yen per month. As of the end of July last year, 1,019 students had received a total of 890.24 million yen.

However, even if all of those children continued to receive these grants until they graduated, the total would only reach about 4 billion yen.

The prefecture has been reluctant to increase the amount, partly because some children have already graduated, and partly because it would create too much of a disparity between them and children orphaned by traffic accidents.

As students in the prefecture have had the highest rate of nonattendance at junior high school for two straight years and mental care is emerging as an issue, prefectural officials are considering expanding the funds to other children hit by the disaster, not just those who lost their parents. However, the central government already provides funds for this, so the prefecture has delayed its decision, waiting to see whether the central government will continue this support beyond fiscal 2016.

Iwate and Fukushima prefectures have already increased payments to orphaned children or expanded coverage to all children in disaster-hit areas, leaving Miyagi Prefecture alone with no clear forecast for spending the large remainder of its donations.

In fiscal 2012, Iwate Prefecture started providing funds to pay for textbooks and uniforms for children hit by the disaster, and in fiscal 2013, it roughly doubled student grants to orphaned children.

Fukushima Prefecture, meanwhile, revised an ordinance in 2012 so it could apply funds to subsidize the education of all children in the prefecture under the age of 18. It now also uses funds for dietary education and in supporting nonprofit organizations. Before revising the ordinance, it sent letters informing all donors of its plan to expand use of their funds, but did not receive any objections, prefectural officials said.

Prince William in Fukushima

February 24, 2015

Abe to accompany Prince William on tour of disaster-affected Fukushima

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201502240025

February 24, 2015

By SHINICHI FUJIWARA/ Staff Writer

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will engage in a bit of public relations when he shepherds Britain's Prince William on a high-profile tour of areas in Fukushima Prefecture devastated by the 2011 disaster.

Abe and William will visit the prefecture on Feb. 28, just days ahead of the fourth anniversary March 11 of the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami that triggered the nuclear crisis there.

The visit is intended to show the world how reconstruction work in stricken areas is proceeding.

"Many foreigners fled from Japan after the disaster so it holds special significance for us to demonstrate to the world the reconstruction of these areas through the prince," said an official close to the prime minister.

It will be William's first visit to Japan. He is scheduled to arrive in Japan on Feb. 26 and stay until March 1. His wife, pregnant with the couple's second child, will remain in Britain.

Officials are still coordinating the itinerary, but Abe is expected to accompany William to speak with disaster victims in their homes.

They are also expected to meet with evacuees from the accident at the Fukushima No.1 nuclear power plant.

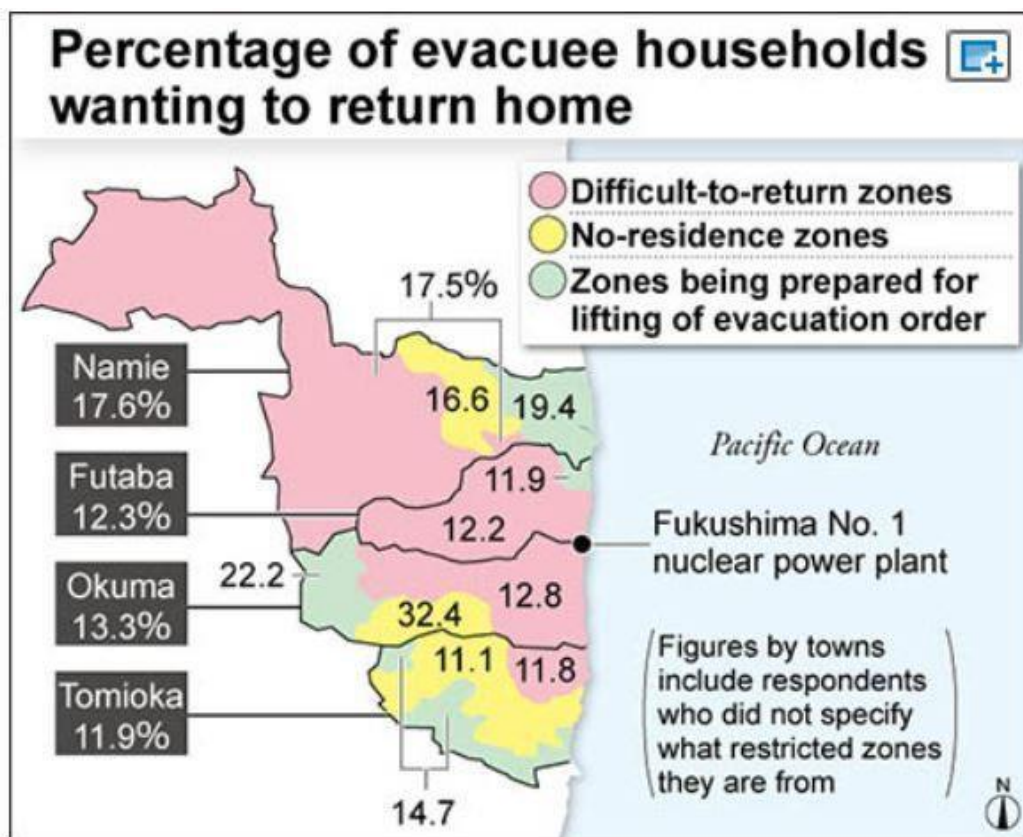
Other plans include observing indoor play areas set up after the disaster for children. At night, Abe will host a traditional dinner for William at a hot spring inn.

Only one-fifth of evacuees want to return

February 25, 2015

Fukushima cleanup fails to convince as just 10 to 20% of evacuees seek return

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201502250050>



The Asahi Shimbun

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Less than one-fifth of evacuees from the Fukushima nuclear disaster say they want to return to their homes, despite government efforts to speed up reconstruction in areas with lower radiation levels.

The finding came from a survey by the Reconstruction Agency conducted between August and October last year that covered about 7,100 evacuee households in Namie; 2,400 in Futaba; 4,000 in Okuma; and 5,600 in Tomioka.

Between 51 percent and 60 percent of the households responded to the poll, including those living outside Fukushima Prefecture.

The four towns, all situated near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, are divided into three zones based on annual radiation dosage levels: "difficult-to-return zones" with 50 millisieverts or more; "no-residence zones" between 20 and 50 millisieverts; and "zones being prepared for lifting of evacuation order," with 20 millisieverts or less.

The central government has placed priority on decontaminating and reconstructing infrastructure in the latter zones to enable residents to return to their homes.

However, the survey showed that just 19.4 percent of evacuee households from "zones being prepared for lifting of evacuation order" in Namie wanted to return, while 14.7 percent of those in the zones in Tomioka felt the same.

Among evacuees from no-residence zones, 16.6 percent of households from Namie and 11.1 percent from Tomioka said they plan to return home when they are allowed.

Among those evacuated from difficult-to-return zones, 17.5 percent of households from Namie and 11.8 percent from Tomioka said they hope to resettle in their homes some day.

About 80 percent of all households in Namie and 70 percent of those in Tomioka are from no-residence zones and "zones being prepared for lifting of evacuation order."

Still, even if the government lifts the evacuation order for these areas, only a handful of evacuees are likely to return, which would crimp revitalization plans for the towns.

Meanwhile, 32.4 percent of households evacuated from no-residence zones in Okuma, which cohosts the crippled plant with Futaba, said they want to return home.

The higher figure reflects preferential construction by the central government and town office of key facilities to promote the town's reconstruction, spurring hope among residents to return.

Decontamination work and restoration of a local highway route are also nearing an end in Okuma.

However, just 3 percent of Okuma residents are from no-residence zones, while the rest are from difficult-to-return zones.

Some continue to measure radioactivity

February 24, 2015

Hot on the trail of radioactivity, despite dwindling public interest in the issue

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201502240004

By YUKARI TAKAHASHI/ Staff Writer

Although there is less call for their services, a number of Tokyo-based citizens groups continue to monitor radioactivity levels to assuage those still not convinced that the worst of the 2011 nuclear crisis is over. One such organization, Albireo, works out of the Mukodai district of Nishi-Tokyo in the capital's western suburbs.

At an event in November attended by local residents, participants put pears harvested in Fukushima and Nishi-Tokyo into a blender and then heated the mash. The samples were put in a container set onto radiation measurement apparatus made in Belarus.

Homemaker Rumiko Hashiba, 55, is a local resident who participated in the exercise. She too purchased instruments to measure atmospheric radioactivity levels shortly after the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

She started to take readings in her garden, local parks and elsewhere, always paying close attention to the radioactivity levels of the water and food she consumed.

In recent months, Hashiba has become increasingly concerned about a drop in media coverage on radiation levels and lack of interest in the issue by those around her.

"We don't know anything until we actually take measurements," Hashiba said after the event. "I was relieved to be able to discuss issues I can't talk about in my daily life."

In the 30-minute session that day, neither of the pears from Fukushima or Nishi-Tokyo registered cesium levels above the detection limit.

Albireo came into being in July 2012, after Makoto Yamada, a 73-year-old local doctor, bought dosimeters and other devices to detect radiation. Yamada is the head of a nationwide network of pediatricians to protect children from radioactivity.

Albireo has 30 or so staff members who are trained in measuring radiation levels. They mainly determine radioactivity in food, but also monitor fruit juice and other drinks.

The facility received around 10 requests for radioactivity measurements in the first few months after it opened. But these days, only one or two requests come in each month.

Dwindling interest has made it difficult for the operators to cover expenses for rent, the cost of promotional material for meetings and so on, with fees for dealing with measurement requests. The operators opted to run the service through a membership system last October.

Albireo currently has 45 members who regularly give lectures to inform local citizens of their activities.

Now that almost four years have passed since the crisis unfolded, Albireo is not the only privately-funded group that is feeling the pinch.

Another is **Shinjuku-Yoyogi Shimin Sokuteijo** (Shinjuku-Yoyogi citizens radioactivity measurement station), which was established in 2012 in Tokyo's Shibuya Ward.

The group specializes in detecting radioactive materials in urine, a rarity in the field. As it is equipped with powerful devices such as an accurate germanium semiconductor detector, the group even receives requests for radiation readings from other monitoring stations. Yet, requests from the public for readings on food have declined significantly with only one case or so coming in each week.

Expenses including rent are paid by Hiroyuki Kuwano, the 52-year-old chairman.

"We're not making any profit, but we want to continue our services for people who are worried, even if we have scale down our operations," he said.

Yamada of Albireo, who continues to provide consultation services with regard to the health of children in Fukushima Prefecture following the disaster, said: "We don't know what could happen 10 or 20 years from now. That's why we have to continue making efforts as citizens to respond in case of future events. If people can maintain their interest in the issue and continue measuring radioactivity levels, we can keep the memories of the Fukushima nuclear crisis from fading."

4,000 dollars "miracle pine" pen

February 26, 2015

'Miracle pine' gets new life as luxury pen

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201502260029>



A Montblanc fountain pen made from branches of the "miracle pine tree" in Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture, which withstood the deadly tsunami on March 11, 2011 (Naoaki Terasawa)

By NAOAKI TERASAWA/ Staff Writer

RIKUZENTAKATA, Iwate Prefecture--A memorial pen made from branches of the "miracle pine tree" that survived the 2011 tsunami was displayed on Feb. 25 with a whopping price tag of 481,000 yen (\$4,040). The fountain pen, produced by German luxury writing instruments and jewelry maker Montblanc, was commissioned by the city of Rikuzentakata, which was devastated by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

It will go on sale on March 11, the fourth anniversary of the disaster.

During a news conference in the city on Feb. 25, Montblanc International CEO Jerome Lambert said that while Europe is geographically far from Tohoku, its people are always with the disaster victims in spirit.

The company will donate 20 percent of the earnings to the city to help with reconstruction efforts. The so-called miracle pine tree was the only one among 70,000 pine trees in the famed Takata Matsubara forest to survive the more than 13-meter-high tsunami waves. It became a much-needed symbol of hope for victims of the disaster, but it later died due to saline contamination from the seawater. However, in a project that cost 150 million yen, the city preserved the tree in July 2013 by inserting a pole through the trunk. It then asked Montblanc to make memorial products using the tree's discarded branches so that they would not go to waste. The company manufactured the memorial pen in Germany, using the pine tree in its body and cap. An engraving on the writing tool reads "Rikuzentakata 11/03/2011." A total of 113 pens will be sold to commemorate the date of the disaster. Rikuzentakata Mayor Futoshi Toba noted that the pine tree was among the few things that gave residents hope in the desperate days following the disaster. "With Montblanc's support, we hope this memorial pen will help people around the world understand the disaster," Toba said.

Fishermen are angry

February 26, 2015

Fukushima fishermen slam TEPCO over latest toxic water leak

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150226p2g00m0dm043000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA, Japan (Kyodo) -- Fishermen in Fukushima Prefecture criticized Tokyo Electric Power Co. on Wednesday following the revelation of another leak of radioactive water into the ocean from the crippled nuclear plant and the utility's failure to take immediate measures despite learning of the possibility of a leak last spring.

"I don't understand why you (TEPCO) kept silent (about the leakage) even though you knew about it. Fishery operators are absolutely shocked," Masakazu Yabuki, chief of the Iwaki fisheries cooperative, told a meeting with TEPCO officials.

To curb the amount of toxic water building up at the complex, TEPCO sought approval from local fishermen for its plan to pump up tainted groundwater from wells at the plant -- before it mixes with water in reactor buildings with even higher radiation levels -- and dump it into the ocean after processing it. But the latest mishap could further delay implementation of the plan.

TEPCO said Tuesday that contaminated rainwater accumulating on the rooftop of the No. 2 reactor building has flowed into the ocean through a gutter every time it has rained.

The level of radioactive cesium in rainwater samples collected last week stood at 29,400 becquerels per liter, while that of beta ray-emitting substances, such as strontium, measured 52,000 becquerels, according to the plant operator.

But Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said the situation is "completely under control" and radiation levels in the ocean outside an enclosed port area adjacent to the plant are well below the legal limits.

Any negative impact of radioactive water on the environment is "completely blocked," the government's top spokesman told a press conference.

Fukushima Gov. Masao Uchibori said during Wednesday's meeting with TEPCO officials that it is "regrettable that a problem which causes anxiety to people in Fukushima has occurred, and that information was not disclosed immediately," adding that local municipal officials and experts will conduct on-site inspections.

Hiroyuki Sato, the chief of the Soma Futaba fisheries cooperative, also slammed TEPCO, saying the incident "destroyed trust" between the operator and local fishermen.

TEPCO said it has been aware since April that radiation levels in water running in the gutter were high, but it failed to identify the source of contamination and did not take measures to prevent the water from leaking.

Shunichi Tanaka, chairman of Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority, urged the plant operator to disclose such information promptly.

In a separate incident, TEPCO said recently that highly contaminated water leaked into the nearby bay through a different gutter, but the company claimed the water did not flow into the ocean outside the bay. The cause and the amount of water leakage remain unknown.

Fishermen lodge protest against TEPCO

February 27, 2015

Fisheries group lodges protest against Tepco's failure to disclose leak of radioactive rainwater

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/02/27/national/fisheries-group-lodges-protest-against-tepcos-failure-to-disclose-leak-of-radioactive-rainwater/#.VPDHVy51Cos>

by Kazuaki Nagata

Staff Writer

The central organization representing Japan's fishery cooperatives lodged a strong protest Friday over Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s failure to disclose the recent leak of radioactive rainwater from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant into the sea, calling it a betrayal of fishermen and the public.

It is undeniable that (this failure) will further spread the harmful rumor that has been troubling fishermen nationwide and will largely affect the future of the fishing industry. The anger among local fishermen who have been waiting to resume their business is immeasurable," the National Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations said in a statement submitted to industry minister Yoichi Miyazawa, who oversees Tepco.

On Tuesday, Tepco said it knew that a drainage ditch running near the contaminated reactor buildings has been showing high levels of radiation and that rainwater running there has been flowing into the seas since last spring.

Hiroshi Kishi, chairman of the federation, urged the minister and Tepco to thoroughly explain why the company had not informed the public of this issue, to implement measures to stop the leak and to strengthen radiation monitoring of the sea.

Naohiro Masuda, who heads Tepco's decommissioning unit, apologized Thursday for the failure to disclose the information and said that decommissioning Fukushima No. 1 may be delayed.

"To make progress with the decommissioning effort and solve the tainted-water issue, the trust of the people in Fukushima is the most important thing. We've been working with that in mind, but unfortunately, we have damaged that trust," Masuda said.

One task expected to be affected by the surge in radiation detected in water draining into the sea is the effort to pump slightly tainted groundwater from wells around the reactor buildings.

About 300 tons of clean groundwater seeps into the reactor buildings each day before mingling with the tainted cooling water, and Tepco is hoping to use the pumping maneuver to reduce the amount of groundwater and treat it so it can be dumped into the sea.

The utility, however, needs the fishermen's approval to dump it — a prospect the latest problem appears to have endangered.

The company said Wednesday it had not thought the information needed to be disclosed, citing a lack of data from seawater samples taken about 1 km from the drainage outlet indicating the levels of radiation in the sea around the ditch have spiked visibly.

Masuda also said that Tepco had thought Fukushima Prefecture residents and the general public were more interested in information on other risky decommissioning tasks, such as managing the hundreds of water storage tanks and removing tainted water from the underground trenches connected to the Fukushima No. 1 reactor buildings.

But Kishi of the federation slammed Tepco's apparent lack of understanding for the fishermen caused the delay of announcing the water leak.

Tepco has detected some 1,050 becquerels of cesium and 1,500 becquerels of beta ray-emitting materials per liter of water in an outlet leading to the sea last August.

Highly radioactive pools of water on the roof of the reactor 2 building are believed to be the source of contamination, as the radiation levels have gone up when it rains and rainwater goes to the ditch from the roof.

Fishermen withhold decision on wastewater draining

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150227_43.html

Feb. 27, 2015 - Updated 10:47 UTC+1

Fishermen working near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant decided to withhold their judgment on a plan to reduce the huge volume of wastewater at the plant following the revelation that tainted rainwater leaked into the sea.

Leaders of the fisheries association in Iwaki City held a closed-door meeting to discuss the matter on Friday.

Tokyo Electric Power Company announced this week that contaminated rainwater had leaked into the sea from the roof of the No.2 reactor building through a drainage channel. The company did nothing to

stop the leaks.

Association leaders said after the meeting that TEPCO betrayed their trust by failing to disclose the leaks, although it discovered the problem last April.

The company has asked the fisheries associations in Iwaki and nearby Soma City to accept the plan to pump up tainted groundwater from the wells, remove radioactive substances, and release the water into the ocean.

The Iwaki association is not confident of the safety of the plan.

Association chief Masakazu Yabuki told reporters that the participants were too angry to discuss the plan and he has no idea when they can resume discussions.

National fishermen's federation criticizes TEPCO

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150227_28.html

Feb. 27, 2015 - Updated 07:47 UTC+1

The head of the Japanese fishermen's federation has criticized the operator of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant over the failure to disclose leaks of contaminated water into the sea.

Hiroshi Kishi, the chairman of the National Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations, and Tetsu Nozaki, the leader of the Fukushima fisheries association, met the president of Tokyo Electric Power Company on Friday.

TEPCO officials said on Tuesday that rainwater with high levels of radioactive substances had leaked into the sea from the roof of the No.2 reactor building through a drainage channel.

TEPCO has known since April last year that radiation levels in the channel rose in rainy weather, but did nothing to stop the leaks or disclose the situation.

In Friday's meeting, Kishi told TEPCO President Naomi Hirose that the company had betrayed and lost the trust of Japanese fishermen by not disclosing the leaks.

He demanded a full explanation of why the information wasn't disclosed, as well as immediate action to completely prevent leaks of contaminated water into drainage channels linked to the sea.

Hirose apologized and said the company never intended to conceal the leaks. He said it will take all possible measures to prevent a recurrence.

Kishi and Nozaki later met Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yoichi Miyazawa.

Miyazawa said he will instruct TEPCO officials to fully disclose information, as this is the basis of a trustful relationship.

Fukushima hospitals lay-offs

February 27, 2015

Hospitals in evacuation zone to lay off workers

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150227_48.html

Feb. 27, 2015 - Updated 11:41 UTC+1

The 2 remaining hospitals in the evacuation zone near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant plan to lay off staff members after the plant's operator stops compensating evacuees.

The privately run hospitals in the Odaka district of Minamisoma City and Namie Town decided to lay off 45 people each. Operations at the hospitals have been suspended since the 2011 nuclear accident.

The plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company, has been paying compensation to evacuees who lost their jobs. But the program ends this month.

The hospitals say they cannot pay wages on their own. Their directors and administrative chiefs are to stay in their posts to find ways to reopen the facilities.

Fukushima Prefecture says 2 other private hospitals were operating in the evacuation zone, but have already dismissed their staffs.

Minamisoma City aims to lift an evacuation order in the Odaka district in April 2016. Namie Town hopes to do the same in 2 years.

Hospitals are seen as essential for a return of evacuees.

The layoffs could affect evacuees' decisions about whether to go back to their homes.

Compensation granted to agricultural cooperative

February 26, 2015

JA Soma employees awarded 27 million yen for income lost to nuclear disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150226p2a00m0na016000c.html>

Several dozen employees at an agricultural cooperative in Fukushima Prefecture were awarded 27.23 million yen in compensation for losing their income due to the nuclear disaster in a settlement mediated by the Nuclear Damage Compensation Dispute Resolution Center, it has been learned.

Seventy-nine employees at JA Soma in the city of Minamisoma won the compensation in an out-of-court settlement mediated by the government-backed alternative dispute resolution (ADR) center after Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) refused to compensate them.

"The settlement attached importance to the actual damage, unlike TEPCO's formalities that drew a line (for compensation eligibility)," said Naoto Akiyama, a lawyer specialized in the issue of nuclear damage compensation, in praising the settlement.

According to sources close to the case, JA Soma's service area covers the cities of Minamisoma and Soma as well as the village of Iitate and the town of Shinchi. In the wake of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster, JA Soma's business deteriorated, forcing it to cut back on its bonuses on seven occasions between the spring of 2011 and the spring of 2013.

All of JA Soma's 405 employees at the time filed a compensation claim with TEPCO, but the utility refused to pay damage to 79 of them on the grounds that they were living and working at offices in Soma and Shinchi, where evacuation orders were not in place.

The 79 employees filed a case with the ADR center in November 2013, saying, "It is unfair for the compensation coverage to be different depending on where we work, considering the fact that we are hired under the same terms of employment."

The ADR center's mediator made a settlement proposal to TEPCO, asking the utility to pay compensation to the plaintiffs. TEPCO accepted the proposal in January this year, stating, "We understand that the center gave consideration to the specific circumstances, where the employees were working at an agricultural cooperative that was seriously affected by the nuclear plant accident."

Lawyer Akiyama said, "The settlement has paved the way for the possibility of employees of businesses being awarded compensation even if they were working outside areas subject to damage coverage, as long as their businesses' service areas were partially inside the compensated zones."

A public relations official at TEPCO's Fukushima Revitalization Headquarters said, "There have been other cases settled via ADR, but we can't disclose the content."

Joban expressway: Final stretch completed

February 28, 2015

Entire Joban Expressway set to open with completion of Fukushima stretch

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201502280021>



A radiation reading on the Joban Expressway shows 5.5 microsieverts per hour on Feb. 17. (Asahi Shimbun file photo)

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

A major artery connecting Tokyo to the coastal Tohoku region will open March 1, with the completion of the final stretch that runs past the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Local governments and tourism officials are pinning their hopes that it will facilitate recovery of the region devastated by the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster in 2011, and bolster tourism.

The Joban Expressway extends for about 300 kilometers from Misato in Saitama Prefecture to Watari in Miyagi Prefecture.

The final 14.3-kilometer section connecting the Joban-Tomioka interchange with the Namie interchange, both in Fukushima Prefecture, is to open after prolonged construction delays due to the nuclear disaster that unfolded in March 2011.

However, along one stretch, running 8 km, radiation levels are high enough that residents are not permitted to return to their homes for the foreseeable future.

At one point, the expressway comes within 6 km of the Fukushima plant.

Before the calamity, the only part of the Joban Expressway that remained incomplete was a section between the Yamamoto interchange in Miyagi Prefecture and the Joban-Tomioka interchange.

It took four years to complete work on this final section, as radioactive fallout hampered construction work.

Initially, the expressway's operator, East Nippon Expressway Co., planned to fully open the expressway in fiscal 2014, but the construction delays pushed the date to summer 2015.

However, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe committed his administration a year ago to ensuring the Joban Expressway would open before the coming Golden Week national holiday period starting in late April.

Describing the expressway as "**the symbol of reconstruction**," Abe said in March 2014, "I hope many tourists will visit the disaster-stricken areas of the Tohoku region."

Last December, government officials said Abe's goal would be pushed forward by two months, leading to the March 1 opening.

Akihiro Ota, the transport minister, said at a Feb. 27 news conference, **"I expect (the opening) will lead to an acceleration of companies building facilities in the region and the promotion of tourism and exchanges between people."**

Koichi Fujita, who heads the economy department in the Minami-Soma city government, said the opening of the Joban Expressway would have significant economic effect.

Organizers of the annual Soma Nomaoui equestrian festival in Minami-Soma hope the road will bring more visitors from the greater Tokyo area. The event's 2014 installment drew about 90 percent of the pre-disaster visitor level.

Pundit and writer Hiroki Azuma has proposed turning the crippled Fukushima plant into a tourist destination.

"I hope people from the Tokyo metropolitan area will exit the expressway in Fukushima and take a look at the homes near the plant that have been gated off," Azuma said. "I hope residents will use this as an opportunity to send a message to the world and pass the memory of the nuclear incident on to future generations."

As local schools avoid roads that pass through areas with high radiation levels, such institutions will not likely be using the last Fukushima stretch of the Joban Expressway--even if it reduces travel time.

The heaviest users are expected to be trucks carrying soil and debris contaminated with radiation to be stored at an interim facility under construction near the Fukushima plant.

The rerouting of such traffic is in response to concerns raised by local residents about the nature of the cargo passing close to their homes.

(This article was written by Hiroki Ito, Masakazu Honda and Seiichi Kobayashi.)

Joban expressway

March 1, 2015

Final section of Joban Expressway opens following decontamination

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150302p2a00m0na005000c.html>

Cars travel along the Joban Expressway after its full opening on March 1, 2015, in this picture taken from a Mainichi helicopter in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture. The expressway is surrounded by temporary storage sites for soil contaminated with radiation from the Fukushima nuclear disaster. The Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant is seen far in the background. (Mainichi)

The last section of the Joban Expressway opened to traffic on March 1, three years later than scheduled, following a temporary suspension of construction due to the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami and the ensuing Fukushima nuclear disaster.

The final section of the expressway extends 14.3 kilometers between the Joban Tomioka and Namie interchanges in Fukushima Prefecture. The 300.4-kilometer expressway, which runs from Misato Junction in Saitama Prefecture to the Watari Interchange in Miyagi Prefecture is expected to help boost the recovery of areas hit by the March 2011 disasters.

A total of 8.7 kilometers of the newly opened section runs through a contaminated area where the yearly radiation dosage exceeds 50 millisieverts -- deemed difficult for residents to return. The remainder runs through an area where dwelling restrictions are in place, marking radiation readings of over 20 millisieverts but under 50 millisieverts per year.

According to the Cabinet Office, a car traveling at 70 kilometers per hour for one trip along the expressway would be exposed to a radiation dosage of 0.17 microsieverts. The dosage received during a chest X-ray is about 60 microsieverts, or nearly 340 times this amount. If an accident occurred and someone waited outside their vehicle for an hour, the maximum radiation dosage would be 6.4 microsieverts. East Nippon Expressway Co. officials therefore say the level on the expressway poses no problems. Large signboards displaying radiation levels at three monitoring points have been placed along the opened route.

Radioactive soil removed during decontamination efforts remains in temporary storage along the expressway. According to East Nippon Expressway Co., decontamination work lowered the maximum airborne radiation level (at a height of one meter above the road) from 35.9 microsieverts per hour to 4.8 microsieverts per hour. In the town of Futaba, where radiation levels are high, slopes outside the guardrails have been covered with concrete to a depth of 15 centimeters for 715 meters along the expressway. This is to limit users' exposure to radiation absorbed by vegetation and soil.

Construction of the expressway began in 1970 as a project to aid economic development in areas along the Pacific coastline. The total cost of the project reached 1.061 trillion yen.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe attended a ceremony on March 1 to mark the opening of the last section of the expressway. Fukushima Gov. Masao Uchibori said he hoped the expressway would serve as a "path of hope" for prefectural residents and boost the recovery of disaster-hit areas.

Municipalities want right to express themselves on restart

March 2, 2015

Municipalities near nuclear plants want more say on reactivation: survey

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150302p2a00m0na014000c.html>

The mayors of over half of the municipalities near those hosting nuclear power plants have told the Mainichi Shimbun in a survey that they oppose reactivation of nuclear power plants based on agreements with the host city and prefecture alone.

The governments of municipalities surrounding those hosting nuclear power plants aren't given the right to express their opinions on reactivation, and there is no means to have their residents' opinions heard in the procedures leading up to reactivation.

In the case of the Sendai Nuclear Power Plant in Kagoshima Prefecture, procedures to obtain local consent only involved the prefecture and the city of Satsumasendai, hosts of the plant. With regards to this method, 11 of the 22 mayors of municipalities hosting nuclear power plants said that they thought it was correct to seek only the host prefecture and municipality's agreement. Only one village mayor said this was wrong. By contrast, the mayors of 60 of the 117 surrounding municipalities within 30 kilometers of the plants said the scope of consent sought was inappropriate. Just 14 said it was right to leave the decision up to the host prefecture and municipality alone.

"The residents of surrounding municipalities have a deep interest in the matter of plant reactivation, and reactivation can no longer be decided based on the opinions of the host municipalities alone," responded the mayor of Fujieda, Shizuoka Prefecture.

The survey also asked the 22 hosting municipalities' mayors whether it was acceptable to restart power plants that meet new safety regulations adopted after the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster. Nine agreed with this stance while five opposed it. Meanwhile, 39 of the mayors of the 117 surrounding municipalities said it was not acceptable to restart the plants, while 23 said it was acceptable, showing a difference in attitude between the mayors of municipalities hosting nuclear power plants and those of the surrounding municipalities.

Fifty-two of the mayors of the surrounding municipalities said that municipalities' opinions were not being reflected in the national government's nuclear power policy, while 34 said they were. Twenty-nine of the 52 mayors who said the municipalities' opinions were not being reflected were also mayors who opposed reactivation.

"There is no opportunity to directly deal with the government," answered the mayor of Kucchan, Hokkaido.

"The understanding of residents is of the utmost importance in nuclear power policy, but the opinions of municipalities are not being represented," wrote the mayor of Fukuroi, Shizuoka Prefecture.

The mayor of Mito wrote, "There is no chance or method to express the voices of municipalities to the national government."

The survey was conducted from late January on the mayors of 135 municipalities specified by the government as "Urgent Protective Action Planning Zones" (UPZs), plus the mayors of four municipalities within 30 kilometers of Electric Power Development Co. (J-Power)'s Oma Nuclear Power Plant, currently undergoing safety inspections ahead of possible activation.

A similar survey was conducted on the mayors of 21 governors of prefectures within UPZs. Two of them, the governors of Fukui and Kagoshima prefectures, both nuclear power plant hosts, said that they thought it was correct to seek only the agreement of hosting municipalities for plant reactivation. The governors of two other nuclear power plant hosts, Ibaraki and Shizuoka prefectures, said they thought it was incorrect, as did the governors of Shiga, Kyoto, Tottori and Nagasaki prefectures, which are located around nuclear power plant hosts.

There is no clear legal basis for the scope of municipalities included when seeking agreement for reactivation of nuclear plants. For the Sendai Nuclear Power Plant, a safety agreement between Kagoshima Prefecture, the city of Satumasendai and Kyushu Electric Power Co. was used as the basis for defining the municipalities whose agreement was necessary. Agreement on the plant's reactivation was expressed first by the Satumasendai Municipal Assembly, then the mayor, followed by the prefectural assembly, then the governor.

The dissatisfaction of municipalities near nuclear plants with their inability to be a part of the process for deciding on plant reactivation is likely to affect the upcoming spring unified local elections.

March 02, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Poetry CD from Fukushima

March 2, 2015

Poetry by Fukushima residents to be released on CD

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/02/national/poetry-fukushima-residents-released-cd/>

Kyodo

An album of poetry composed by people affected by the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear disaster will be released March 11, the fourth anniversary of the earthquake and tsunami that triggered the crisis.

Veteran actress Sayuri Yoshinaga, 69, who has made reciting atomic bomb poetry her life's work, reads the poems on a compact disc titled "Daini gakusho Fukushima e no Omoi" ("Second Movement: Thoughts for Fukushima").

The album is aimed at "recognizing the feelings of Fukushima people who even now cannot return to their homes, and standing together with them," Yoshinaga said.

Since 1986, Yoshinaga has been lending her voice to poems about the U.S. atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II.

In summer 2011, Yoshinaga came across the work of Fukushima poet Ryoichi Wago, who teaches a poetry workshop for children.

She decided to make a spoken album of poems composed by the students taking part in the workshop, as well as those by Shigeko Sato, who was displaced when her home in the town of Tomioka became part of an exclusion zone in the wake of the nuclear crisis.

Sato's poems "have been written out of compulsive feelings, which come through directly even when the poems are read quietly," Yoshinaga said. "Some of her poems are distressing, but I have chosen those in which hope can be seen."

To witness with her own eyes the tragedy of the affected areas, Yoshinaga paid a visit last December to the village of Katsurao, which remains under an evacuation order.

"I was more shocked than I could have ever imagined," she said. "I cannot fully express in my readings the sadness of being completely unable to return to one's home."

Yoshinaga said she fears that the disaster is beginning to fade from Japanese people's minds, even as some victims remain displaced.

"With the economy taking top priority, I cannot tell what politicians are thinking about Fukushima's recovery or whether they intend to allow people to return to their hometowns," she said. "I think nuclear power plants have no place in such a small country with so many earthquakes. We have to try harder to find ways to live safely."

The title of the album, "The Second Movement," is a reflection of an album of poems Yoshinaga released in 1997 about the atomic bombing of Hiroshima.

Yoshinaga said the title describes the need to keep telling the stories of the bombing so it is not forgotten, even following Hiroshima's recovery. Fukushima, which has not yet fully recovered, "may still be in its first movement," she said.

Having gone on to release "Second Movement" albums focusing on Nagasaki, Okinawa and now Fukushima, Yoshinaga said she wants the fourth in the series to be the last, and for no such tragedies to happen again.

The album about Okinawa is themed on the 1945 Battle of Okinawa, the World War II ground battle that claimed more than 200,000 lives.

The poems in the album on Fukushima are accompanied by music composed and performed by traditional *shakuhachi* bamboo flute player Dozan Fujiwara.

"Music can express what words cannot. I feel that by putting the poetry and music together, we have made something that can help those affected by the disaster," Fujiwara said.

The royalties from the CD, which will go on sale for ¥3,024, will be donated to helping the victims of the disaster.

Persevering students rewarded

March 2, 2015

Persevering Miyagi, Iwate students graduate from temporary school buildings

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201503020076>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

In the three years that students attended a temporary school in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, the landscape outside changed, as the rubble and debris gradually disappeared.

The construction of public housing for evacuees also made progress.

High school students at the temporary building set up on a hill proudly held their graduation ceremony on March 1, looking back on a difficult three years of change and perseverance.

"There was some inconveniences, but nobody complained, and we all tried to positively pursue our studies," said Manae Takahashi, 18, in a graduation speech for her class at the city-run Joshi Shogyo (all-girls commercial) high school.

The ceremony, held in the city-run gymnasium, was attended by 71 class members who entered the school in spring 2012.

As they enrolled at a time when the memories of the disaster were still vivid, the teachers tried to make their school life as enjoyable as possible, planning many field trips. The faculty also tried to keep the students' learning environment comfortable by warming up classrooms before classes began in the wintertime.

The school will be terminated in April and join another city-run school to become Sakurazaka High School. The temporary school building is scheduled to be torn down before the summer.

"I'll miss the school, but I'm proud to be one of its last graduates," Takahashi said.

Also in the Tohoku region, the graduation ceremony for Iwate Prefectural Takata High School students was held at their temporary school building in Ofunato, Iwate Prefecture, on March 1. The school is set to be reopened this spring in Rikuzentakata in the prefecture, where it originally stood before the 2011 disaster.

Nana Fujiwara, 18, the valedictorian of her 169-student graduating class, said in her speech at the ceremony, "We are grateful at how we are now able to casually live our daily lives."

Fujiwara's home in Ofunato was completely destroyed in the disaster, and she lost her grandmother to the tsunami. She could not stop crying afterward every night.

Fujiwara decided to enroll in Takata High School when she saw on a TV program how its students were determinedly trying to resume their lives despite the devastation of the earthquake and tsunami. Fujiwara spent her three years in the school eagerly participating in the student council and as a member of a table tennis club.

"I want to treasure what I learned through an inconvenient time throughout my life," she said following her graduation ceremony.

(This article was written by Akiko Nagashima and Yusuke Hoshino.)

Miracle pine seal

March 1, 2015

Young craftsmen carve reconstruction minister's new seal from 'miracle pine'

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201503010021>



The reconstruction minister's new seal made from the "miracle pine tree" of Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture, is displayed in Tokyo on Feb. 28 (Nobuyoshi Nakamura)

By NOBUYOSHI NAKAMURA/ Staff Writer

When a reconstruction minister gives his official stamp of approval, it will be forever linked to the "miracle pine tree" that survived the March 2011 deadly tsunami and became a symbol of hope for the disaster-affected region.

Young stamp engravers from around Japan carved out a new official seal of the reconstruction minister on Feb. 28, made from the so-called miracle pine of Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture.

The 27-meter tree was the only one among 70,000 pines in the famed Takata Matsubara forest to survive the more than 13-meter-high tsunami waves, which devastated the city.

The pine died due to saline contamination in the soil from the seawater in 2012, but the city preserved it in July 2013 by inserting a pole through the trunk in a project that cost 150 million yen (\$1.25 million). Aiming to assist the city's recovery efforts and spotlight the craftsmanship of seal engravers, the Federation of Japanese Seal Engravers Cooperatives came up with the idea to produce the minister's official stamp with the tree.

The reconstruction agency and Japan Youth Hostels Inc., the owner of the land plot where the tree formerly stood, gave the go-ahead to the project.

On Feb. 28, 19 young stamp engravers gathered in Tokyo and demonstrated their skills in carving the stamp in turn. It took about three hours to complete the official stamp, which will be presented to reconstruction minister Wataru Takeshita on March 9.

"I used to frequently visit Takata Matsubara forest before the disaster, and I engraved the stamp praying for the prompt recovery of the region," said Ryo Kikuchi, a 34-year-old stamp engraver from Ichinoseki, Iwate Prefecture, who participated in the project.

Prince William in Fukushima (2)

March 1, 2015

Prince William delights nuclear accident-affected children before leaving Japan

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201503010027

By MANA NAGANO/ Staff Writer

MOTOMIYA, Fukushima Prefecture--Britain's Prince William visited areas in Fukushima Prefecture impacted by the nuclear accident on Feb. 28, drawing renewed attention from the world to the persistent suffering in the region and providing a boost to local residents.

Accompanied by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, William visited the Smile Kids Park playground in Motomiya and played with local children whose lives have been greatly affected by the nuclear accident set off by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

The playground facility was created by the city in 2012 after thorough decontamination efforts of the area to provide children with a space to play without fearing any effects from radiation contamination.

To leave a memento of his visit, William planted a memorial European oak tree with the help of local children in the outdoor area of the facility.

"He was kind enough to say 'thank you for waiting for me in the cold' to us," said a local elementary fifth-grader who participated in the event.

William wrapped up his four-day visit to Japan and left for China on March 1.

Too much money?

March 3, 2015

Only 40% of Tohoku reconstruction subsidies spent: audit

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/03/national/40-government-subsidies-tohoku-disaster-projects-spent-audit/#.VPXr8y51Cos>

Kyodo

Only 40.5 percent of government subsidies granted to Tohoku reconstruction projects by municipalities and other entities between fiscal 2011 and 2013 was used as planned, according to a review by the Board of Audit.

A total of ¥3.4 trillion was extended to 102 projects during the period for a wide range of projects, including housing, medical services, nursing care and welfare.

However, only ¥1.3 trillion was spent as of the end of fiscal 2013 as **some projects were not carried out as initially planned or may have been over-funded in the first place**, the review showed Monday.

The Board of Audit said the finding is not necessarily problematic, given that reconstruction projects need multiple years to be completed.

But the board, which monitors government spending, urged the central government to “examine whether the scale of such projects is appropriate.”

March 11 will mark the fourth anniversary of the earthquake and tsunami that wreaked havoc on the Tohoku region, but reconstruction is far from complete.

Six projects saw their granted subsidies unused, including one to extend low-interest loans to disaster victims to rebuild or repair houses, partly because it took time to reorganize town lots and prepare them on higher ground.

In the three hardest-hit prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima alone, only 50.9 percent of ¥1.7 trillion in subsidies granted to 62 projects was used.

The review also found a combined ¥136 billion allocated for 32 disaster-related projects had been returned to the central government by the end of March 2014.

Roughly 90 percent of the amount, or ¥123 billion, was given back as the government tightened control over the use of subsidies for reconstruction amid revelations that some subsidies had been diverted to other purposes.

The government allocated ¥25.1 trillion in reconstruction-related budgets from fiscal 2011 to 2013, with around ¥20.1 trillion, or 80.1 percent, spent, according to the board. The rate compares with 77.2 percent in the previous survey that covered fiscal 2011 and 2012.

Around ¥3 trillion was left unspent on such projects as rebuilding public and medical facilities and removing of waste produced in connection with the Fukushima nuclear crisis, as projects were delayed due to poor coordination, according to the report.

Life in Tohoku... 4 years after the disaster



Prefab sprout: Otsuchi Junior High students wave from the window of their temporary school building in the tsunami-hit coastal town of Otsuchi, Iwate Prefecture. | KERRY SHIOYA

March 1, 2015

Four years on, Tohoku towns still waiting for schools, homes, answers

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2015/03/01/issues/four-years-tohoku-towns-still-waiting-schools-homes-answers/>

by Kris Kosaka

“Inquiry” may be a buzzword in education these days, but for Tohoku students and parents, there are too many questions without answers.

A month before the anniversary of the March 11, 2011, triple disaster, I traveled from Kamaishi, Iwate Prefecture, to Rikuzentakata and back to Tokyo, via Minamisoma in Fukushima. As I drove through Natori, on the Miyagi coastline, and past the no-go zone surrounding the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant on my way back south, pile after pile of black waste bags stretched out before me, each seemingly begging its own unanswered question.

In Iwate coastal towns, mounds of raised dirt and clean-shaven fields of nothing mark where debris and chaos once reigned. In Fukushima, the ubiquitous bags of contaminated soil are interspersed with signposts indicating current radiation readings.

For students in many of the affected areas, a return to the mundane world of exams and matriculation has been met with conflicting emotions: a newly discovered maturity and seriousness tempered by a growing sense of entitlement and lack of discipline. Everything about the recovery process is complicated, and as I asked one question, three more arose. Yet some things remained clear.

In every town I visited, educators and parents expressed concern about students' diminished level of physical education. In the Iwate towns of Otsuchi and Rikuzentakata, a lack of facilities and long bus rides to school or playing fields are now the norm; in Minamisoma, concerns about radiation continue to linger. Still, all agree: The students need more space if they are to enjoy an active, healthy lifestyle.

"Almost all of the temporary classrooms were built on school playgrounds, so the children have almost no outdoor space for sports," explains Satoru Gamou, director of the Hakki Project NPO in Rikuzentakata.

"There isn't even enough space for a 100-meter dash on sports day."

Residents have been complaining since the temporary schools were first erected in September 2011, but 3½ years on, much remains the same. Gamou's fond memories of the area's once-strong volleyball and baseball programs are now tinged with regret.

"This April, the new Takata High School will be ready, but there is no sports field, and gym classes will still be held in Ofunato, over 30 km away," says Gamou, 51, who now helps run the temporary housing complex built on the Rikuzen Takata Mobilia campsite he managed before 3/11. "My son, who plays baseball, would have attended Takahata High School, once a baseball powerhouse. Now, nothing remains." Many residents voiced their enduring frustration that while there is an abundance of space in the tsunami-hit areas that could be put to use as sports fields — or where temporary classrooms could be relocated to, freeing up playgrounds and sports fields — creating such areas has not been a priority. Of the four elementary schools and one junior high school that existed in Otsuchi pre-March 2011, only one barely survived the calamity, having been flooded and then burned in the fires that razed the port area. But the repaired Otsuchi Elementary School building houses no students; instead, it is now the City Hall, with a spacious adjoining parking lot, while Otsuchi's 500 elementary and 263 junior high school students are squeezed together in prefabricated buildings on a temporary school site, sharing one small field and a prefab gym.

Construction for a new elementary and junior high is planned on high ground next to the Otsuchi High School, which was untouched by the tsunami, but progress has been slow and completion is still years away. Locals complain that while students spend their days in cramped prefabs, city officials work in a refitted building whose restoration is rumored to have cost ¥8 billion.

"I feel especially sorry that the third-year students here have spent all of their junior high school years in this poor temporary building," says Yasushi Goto, vice principal of Otsuchi Junior High.

Despite their physical surroundings, the students of Otsuchi Junior High greeted us cheerfully through an open window of their makeshift school, waving and practicing their English.

"The students who survived the disaster are much more positive and motivated," Goto says. "You might think the experience of the disaster would have made student behavior worse, but in reality, it made the students stronger."

Goto also praised the hard work and positive attitude of the teachers.

"The staff room is really cramped, but it's brought us closer," he says. "Since we are closer, we smile more, and these smiles are passed on to the students."

In Otsuchi, a rural town hugging the coast of Iwate near Kamaishi, keeping kids in school has always been a struggle, as many quit after junior high to join their parents in the fishing industry, and tensions between inlanders and coastal towns regularly spill over into the schools. Before 2011, Otsuchi schools

were known across Iwate for rowdy students and low educational standards, but residents agree with Goto that the students themselves possess a new maturity.

Miyako Ogayu, whose husband is head of Dainenji Temple in Sendai, has run a reading club for the last eight years serving the community in Otsuchi. Ogayu has long seen books as a gateway to new worlds, and she redoubled her efforts after the disaster, expanding the club to a wider area and helping support young mothers. She too prefers to emphasize the positives that have sprung from adversity.

"The children's horizons have been broadened by meeting so many volunteers — people from other countries or university students from all over Japan," she says. "I think more students are going to university now than ever before."

At the same time, Ogayu worries about the students' emotional health.

"Daily life is becoming easier now, with many new supermarkets or convenience stores opening up, but we are losing our sense of identity as a community. With this loss, people aren't paying attention to the behavior of those around them anymore."

Katsumi Sawaguchi, a longtime resident and community leader, agrees.

"Unfortunately, some of the parents receiving aid have started to take the aid for granted, and they pass this attitude on to their children," he says. "Other parents are so concerned with making a living that they can't think of anything else. Parents hesitate to discipline their children since the kids have been through so much, and volunteers take on the same attitude. Children have learned they will get their way, no matter what they do."

Sawaguchi, a retired businessman and accomplished cut-paper artist, taught his art in schools in Kamaishi as a volunteer before the disaster. Since the 2011 tsunami, he has expanded his volunteer work to include Otsuchi and other areas. He also started the Sakura Project three years ago, planting cherry blossom trees along the mountain evacuation path in Otsuchi, with the dual aim of getting students outside and involved in restoring the natural beauty of their hometown. Sawaguchi echoed the sentiments of Ogayu and others I spoke to in Otsuchi and elsewhere in Tohoku: To support the students, we must support the whole community.

Minamisoma, a small seaside town only 25 km from the wrecked Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, and its neighbors are still reeling from the triple disaster. Driving in on the Joban Expressway, I am struck by the stretches of nothingness. Instead of speed limits, the highway signs warn us of the radiation level.

Psychiatrist Arinobu Hori moved from Tokyo to Minamisoma a year after the earthquake and tsunami, when the evacuation order was lifted, to help residents and take up a job at Fukushima Medical University's Department of Disaster and Comprehensive Medicine. Hori also sees the lack of exercise and growing discipline problems among Fukushima children as symptoms of a larger issue: tired parents, exhausted and overprotective, have few caregivers to support them.

"Parents are torn about the risks involved with radiation exposure," Hori says. "Some are still very conscious of and anxious about the health impact and do not let their children play outside. A lot of parents feel timid and cautious in their parenting, and are overprotective."

On the other hand, Hori is also worried about the growing dependence on television and video games to keep children quiet in temporary housing, where noise and the uncomfortable proximity of neighbors are major concerns.

"I am afraid that in 10 years' time, both the lack of physical exercise and a dependency on gaming will be a problem," he says.

These may seem like minor problems considering what the families have been through, but Hori believes it is these everyday struggles that are wearing residents down.

“Doctors, nurses, teachers and parents are all tired here. There are just not enough people here” to support the remaining residents, he says. “The government is spending too much money on construction and decontamination. These things are important, I agree, but the government should pay more for specialists who can come and take care of the people, and to the few specialists who are already here.” Known for their tenacity, Tohoku residents such as Gamou, Ogayu and Sawaguchi soldier on, determined to do their best for the children, despite all the unanswered questions. Outside NPOs continue to play an important role, too. One success story has been the “collaboration schools” in Onagawa, Miyagi Prefecture, and Otsuchi run by Tokyo-based educational NPO Katariba. Named because it is a “collaboration between local teachers, board of education, nursery school teachers and other interested adults,” the Collabo School project started with the aim of providing a quiet space to study for children living in temporary housing. Over time, the schools have become focal points for the local community. “I tell the parents and the kids that it’s a place where students gather who want to study, but we’ve also heard from teachers that this place has really helped meet the emotional needs of the children,” explains Aya Kawai, 30, director of the school in Otsuchi. “Many children have to commute a long way to school, so as soon as classes are over they get on the school buses to go home, meaning they can’t attend after-school activities or join sports teams. Having a place where they can go after they get home to meet their friends has really helped the children emotionally, teachers have told us.”

Katariba also hopes to make the nation’s student body more aware of their local communities with an initiative that began in Otsuchi called My Project, in which local high school students create and execute a community service project. Kawai’s face lights up as she shares the stories of local students who have accomplished impressive things with “minimal adult interference”: One girl created a program for preschool children to help get them outside and active; another organized the Otsuchi Starry Night Project to “convey the magnificence of the night sky in Otsuchi,” making the most of the absence of street lights after the disaster; another created a wooden monument, hoping it would inspire future generations to rebuild while still remembering the tragedy.

The process of recovery is complicated, explains Hori, especially for young and impressionable students. “The very ordinary things are in danger: having hope for the future, believing in the community support system — just normal, ordinary things are important for their everyday lives,” she says. “Japanese believe they are focused on harmony — and maybe it is true with individuals, but groups in Japan also tend to withdraw inward, saying, ‘This is our area and we will deal with it.’ This kind of thinking makes it very difficult for broader social welfare programs to work, as they depend on the cooperation of many smaller groups, working together.”

Local residents ask: When will construction move forward on the new school in Otsuchi? With school communities fractured, how can people rebuild and reconnect in Rikuzentakata? When will the young caregivers — the pediatricians, day care workers and nurses — and teachers return to Minamisoma to provide support to overwhelmed parents? What do students need most now in the affected areas?

Four years on from the disaster, the people of Tohoku deserve some answers.

Special thanks to Kerry Shioya — guide, translator and storyteller — whose introductions and assistance were invaluable. Learning Curve covers issues related to education in Japan. Your comments and story ideas: community@japantimes.co.jp

New guidelines for nuke accidents

March 4, 2015

New nuclear accident evacuation guideline compiled

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150304_21.html

Mar. 4, 2015 - Updated 06:34 UTC+1

Japan's nuclear regulator has decided new guidelines for nuclear accidents. It will call on residents outside of a 30-kilometer radius of a nuclear power plant to remain indoors if there could be massive fallout from an accident.

At issue now is how to decide the areas and the timing of lifting the warning.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority compiled on Wednesday revised guidelines for evacuating people in the event of a nuclear accident.

Massive fallout was found beyond a 30-kilometer radius of the Fukushima Daiichi plant in the March, 2011 accident. Earlier evacuation guidelines focused only on those who live within 30 kilometers of a plant.

The revised guidelines call on residents outside the 30-kilometer radius to stay inside if there is any possibility of massive amounts of radioactive material reaching their area.

The guidelines note areas at risk will be decided by analyzing radioactivity levels at the plant and local weather conditions to estimate the fallout spread.

It says the order will be lifted after the air mass containing radioactivity no longer covers the area. Authorities would use aerial measurements of radioactivity levels and other metrics.

The guidelines will be finalized after receiving public comments, which will be accepted for 30 days, starting on Thursday.

Gov't support still indispensable for evacuees

March 4, 2015

Evacuees say they need state support once housing subsidies end

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/04/national/many-evacuees-say-they-need-state-support-once-housing-subsidies-end/#.VPbkAC51Cos>

Kyodo

People uprooted from their homes after the March 2011 disasters and now living in state-subsidized rental housing in Sendai say they will need continued support from the government after funding for the program ends next spring, a survey by a Sendai-based nonprofit organization has found.

Although 51 percent of the residents surveyed want to remain in the properties, 93 percent said they cannot afford full-market rent, the research showed.

Rather than purpose-built, prefabricated units used as temporary homes for many of the evacuees, the residents surveyed live in quasi-temporary housing under a system whereby authorities rent properties from the private sector and let them to evacuees at concessionary rates or for free.

As with the prefab units, many residents will see their subsidized contracts end in spring next year, five years after the disaster.

But the survey by the Personal Support Center found that of the residents, “a considerable number are having great difficulty putting their lives back in order, and cutting off their rent waivers all at once could have major detrimental effects.”

Researcher Taku Sugano, a board member at the center and also part of the Kobe-based Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution, mailed the questionnaire to 2,658 households in subsidized rental housing in March last year, and received 802 responses.

Among the 51 percent of respondents who want to stay in their present accommodation after the deadline, only 8 percent said they could continue to live there paying the rent in full.

Seven percent of the group said they could handle paying 80 percent of the rent, 18 percent said they could pay 60 percent, 23 percent said they could shoulder 40 percent, and 17 percent said they could pay 20 percent.

The largest proportion, 28 percent, said they could only afford to remain in the properties if the rent was fully subsidized.

The answers were correlated with respondents’ incomes — those who said they could pay the full rent reported an average annual income of ¥4.21 million, while those who felt they could pay 40 percent of the rent or less earned just ¥2.35 million.

Sugano said the research shows some of the households will need to continue receiving aid, reflecting their income.

Even as prefabricated units in the disaster areas continue to empty out, authorities are “worrying about how to get (residents) to move out of the subsidized rental housing,” a government source said.

In January, Miyagi Prefecture said it plans to allow local authorities and residents to continue temporary housing arrangements beyond the five-year deadline on condition that the authorities have almost finished arranging public housing for disaster victims.

What choice for evacuees?

March 4, 2015

More Fukushima evacuees are deciding to stay away for good

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/04/national/more-fukushima-evacuees-are-deciding-to-stay-away-for-good/#.VPbi7i51Cos>

JJI

FUKUSHIMA – Around 120,000 residents of Fukushima Prefecture remain evacuees due to lingering fears of radiation exposure four years after the start of the nuclear crisis.

Although the central government lifted evacuation orders on some areas last year, evacuees have been slow to move back and an increasing number are choosing to rebuild their lives in new places without returning to their old homes.

Of the 120,000 nuclear evacuees, 79,000 are from areas adjacent to the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant who were ordered to evacuate because of high radiation levels, according to the Cabinet Office.

The rest left their homes voluntarily.

The number of evacuees currently residing outside Fukushima Prefecture total about 46,000. At least a few are in every other prefecture.

A growing number of the people from areas where residents were ordered to leave are using compensation to find permanent homes in the areas where they now live.

Those still under evacuation orders are entitled to a real estate tax break adopted by the central government to help them buy property.

The number of land purchases using the tax break was only 35 in fiscal 2011 but rose to 356 in fiscal 2012 and 804 in fiscal 2013. In the first half of fiscal 2014, the number of purchases was 593.

As of the end of last September, 1,451 of the deals were for plots in Fukushima Prefecture. The rest were in 29 other prefectures, including 88 in Ibaraki, 69 in Tochigi, 36 in Miyagi and 33 in Saitama.

The number of purchases for other forms of housing under the tax break stood at 28 in fiscal 2011, 323 in fiscal 2012 and 598 in fiscal 2013.

The figures for both land and other housing indicate a growing desire among the evacuees to abandon their old homes.

“As our families and young people have left the town, the environment there has been devastated,” said Naokiyo Suzuki, 63, who fled from Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, to Hatoyama, Saitama Prefecture. Suzuki bought a piece of land in the neighboring city of Sakado, where his house will be completed in August.

Because there are many young families living in the neighborhood, “I don’t know if I can fit in, but I hope to move forward step by step,” Suzuki said.

The population of Fukushima Prefecture has fallen by some 90,000 to below 2 million since the disaster. In light of this situation, the prefecture started offering rent-free housing in 2012 in some areas where radiation levels are low to encourage voluntary evacuees to return.

However, due to the inflow of workers engaged in reconstruction projects, the housing supply is now tight in the prefecture.

“Support measures are not taking effect due to the housing shortage,” an official at a nonprofit organization helping evacuees said.

Because people who left on a voluntary basis can’t receive compensation from Tokyo Electric Power Co. for the damage caused by the catastrophe at its nuclear power plant, many are facing difficulty in putting their lives back together, said a Fukushima Prefectural Government official in charge of evacuee support. Ritsuko Kamino, a 42-year-old part-time worker, moved from Koriyama to Naha, Okinawa Prefecture, eight months after the nuclear crisis began.

"It's better not to live in fear," Kamino said as she recalled nervously checking radiation levels and telling her 7-year-old son not to play outdoors.

With a support measure for covering the rents of evacuees set to expire this spring, however, Kamino has new worries.

"I'm not sure if I can make ends meet on my own," she said. "I haven't talked about this very much with my husband in Tokyo."

A government survey in fiscal 2014 covering 16,600 households in seven municipalities affected by evacuation orders found that 48 percent of the respondents do not plan to return home. They cited concerns over radioactive materials, the lack of progress in managing the buildup of radioactive water at the Tepco plant and other reasons.

"Measures to help evacuees rebuild their lives in new environments should be strengthened as well as those to help them return home," said Hiroshi Suzuki, a professor emeritus at Fukushima University.

In the town of Namie, which remains empty of people, there are black bags of contaminated soil everywhere, the result of decontamination work. The radiation level inside car generally stands at around 0.3 microsievert per hour, but it surges to nearly 1 microsievert when passing areas that have yet to be decontaminated.

University of Tokyo professor Tatsuhiko Kodama, who has been helping with decontamination in Namie and other areas around the nuclear plant, said that "although it is up to the residents whether they ultimately decide to return or not, it is necessary to create environments where they have a choice."

Majority of Fukushima residents dissatisfied with handling of disaster

March 4, 2015

FOUR YEARS AFTER: 71% of residents dissatisfied with work at Fukushima nuclear plant

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201503040063>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Around 71 percent of Fukushima Prefecture residents remain dissatisfied with the central government's handling of the nuclear disaster four years after the triple meltdown forced hundreds of thousands to flee their homes, a survey showed.

Only 14 percent of respondents were satisfied with the central government's efforts at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, according to the telephone survey conducted jointly by The Asahi Shimbun and Fukushima Broadcasting Co. on Feb. 28 and March 1.

In surveys conducted six months after the nuclear accident was triggered by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, and before the first, second and third anniversaries of the disasters, the dissatisfaction rates were between 70 and 80 percent.

Although the latest rate of dissatisfaction was down slightly from the previous survey, it was still high ahead of the fourth anniversary of the disasters.

The latest survey received valid responses from 1,028 eligible voters in Fukushima Prefecture, or 57 percent of those contacted.

Evacuation orders for certain areas around the nuclear plant have been lifted, but thousands of people still live away from their homes, including many who now reside outside the prefecture.

Radioactive water leaks, malfunctioning equipment, human errors and botched plans have persistently hampered work to decommission the reactors at the plant.

Shortly before the latest survey was taken, reports surfaced that Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the plant, did not reveal for about 10 months that water contaminated with radioactive materials had been flowing from the plant into the ocean.

Asked about TEPCO's stance, 80 percent of respondents said "it was a major problem," while 16 percent said "it was somewhat of a problem."

Only 2 percent said "there was not much of a problem," while 1 percent said "there was no problem at all."

However, the Fukushima residents were more evenly split on work by the central and local governments to decontaminate areas affected by radiation.

A combined 49 percent of respondents either "highly appraised" or "somewhat appraised" the decontamination efforts.

In comparison, a combined 48 percent either "did not appraise" or "somewhat did not appraise" the work.

Those figures marked an **improvement in public opinion of the cleanup work.**

In the two previous surveys, the combined percentages of respondents not appraising the decontamination work exceeded 60 percent, while only about 40 percent appraised the efforts.

Nuclear Watch

NUCLEAR WATCH

March 5, 2015

Maintaining the Tragic Memories

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclearwatch/20150305.html>

Nearly 4 years after the Great East Japan Earthquake, NHK surveyed residents of the 3 hardest-hit prefectures. Of the more than 700 respondents, nearly 80 percent felt that the public's focus on the disaster and the ensuing nuclear accident is fading. One resident has dedicated himself to passing his experiences on to others, in a bid to keep the memories alive.

61-year-old Kenichi Hasegawa, a dairy farmer from the village of Iitate, in Fukushima prefecture, visited Hokkaido last month to share his experiences.

The nuclear accident forced him to destroy all of his milk cows.

"I was standing there in my empty cowshed, wondering what I could do... how I could support my family," Hasegawa said.

Dairy farmers in Iitate were not allowed to ship their milk because of the nuclear fallout.

They had no choice but to get rid of their cows, into which they had poured so much work and love. One tragedy fed off another.

"Had it not been for the nuclear plant..." is how a message written on a wall begins.

The message was left by a colleague of Hasegawa's who committed suicide three months after the disaster.

It was then that Hasegawa decided to start his speaking campaign in Japan and abroad to let people know about the dire situation in Fukushima.

"I thought to myself, 'This is absolutely unacceptable. Period. I have to tell everybody about this.' That's how I got started," Hasegawa said.

Hasegawa is concerned that the public may be losing interest in the tragic events of four years ago. And in the fact that the disasters are still casting a big shadow over peoples' lives.

Entries in his datebook record the 250 speeches he has given. He gave 100 in the first year after the disaster.

But now he gives only half as many.

"It's gradually fading away. The memory is slowly disappearing from the minds of the Japanese people. That's what I feel very strongly," Hasegawa said.

With an evacuation order still in effect, access to the entire village remains restricted. Amid all the uncertainty, Hasegawa made the major decision this winter to tear down his cowshed.

The move was prompted by the decision of his frustrated eldest son, who is in his 30s, to leave the village to start a dairy farm somewhere else.

None of his family members can foresee a time when they can return home. Despite all the turmoil, Hasegawa headed off to give another speech, this time in Tokyo.

"What can we do in such a tainted village?" Hasegawa asked. "There are no young people. What would the elderly do even if they were to return? That's the reality we have to face squarely."

Hasegawa stressed that the people of his hometown share a feeling of being trapped, with no way out.

"I am relieved to know that there are still people in Tokyo who care about us," Hasegawa said. "I hope they will help spread my words. Keeping them interested in the disaster is critical now. That's the way I see it."

End of "intensive reconstruction period"?

March 5, 2015

Gov't considering having local gov'ts shoulder post-disaster reconstruction costs

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150305p2a00m0na016000c.html>

Reconstruction Minister Wataru Takeshita has said that the government will consider having local governments in disaster-hit regions shoulder some of post-disaster reconstruction expenses in fiscal 2016 and thereafter.

The government planned to foot all the bills to rebuild Japan's northeast, which was hit by the March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, ensuing tsunami and the Fukushima nuclear accident, during the so-called "intensive reconstruction period" between the 2011 and 2015 fiscal years. As to what should be done after the intensive reconstruction period ends, Takeshita said, "It will be difficult to continue the rebuilding projects (solely on government funding)."

With respect to government-led decontamination work in the "difficult-to-return zones" where yearly radiation levels are above 50 millisieverts due to the outbreak of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear

Power Plant, Takeshita said that the government will place priority on decontaminating those areas with important infrastructure. On whether to decontaminate the entire "difficult-to-return" zones, he said, "That's impossible."

Takeshita revealed the plans during an interview with the Mainichi Shimbun and other media outlets ahead of the fourth anniversary on March 11 of the triple disasters.

The government set the overall reconstruction period for 10 years through fiscal 2020, and is shouldering all expenses for reconstruction projects during the intensive reconstruction period -- the first half of the 10-year-reconstruction period -- out of consideration for the scale of the earthquake disaster as well as the fact that many local governments in the affected regions are on weak fiscal footing. Takeshita characterized this as "the most extraordinary of extraordinary measures." Regarding principal reconstruction projects such as land development and building disaster restoration housing and embankments, he said, "There is sufficient meaning in doing these projects (completely at government expense)."

Meanwhile, Takeshita said the government would hold talks with local governments in the disaster-stricken regions on ways of distributing expenses and securing financial resources because it would be difficult for the government to cover costs for all projects in fiscal 2016 and thereafter. In light of the harsh fiscal conditions, the government is apparently aiming to streamline reconstruction projects by asking local governments to shoulder some of the costs. But the talks are expected to run into rough waters as Miyagi, Fukushima and Iwate prefectures are seeking that the central government continue to foot the bill for all reconstruction projects.

Kamishibai stories of disaster

March 4, 2015

Fukushima evacuees to tell their stories through picture boards at Tokyo event



Yoshihiro Ozawa, pictured here in Koori, Fukushima Prefecture, tells stories of his hometown, a no-go zone in Fukushima, through the "kamishibai" storytelling art form. (Mainichi)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/features/news/20150304p2a00m0et017000c.html>

A group of Fukushima Prefecture residents who are still living away from their homes as a result of the March 2011 nuclear disaster will tell their stories through "kamishibai" -- a storytelling technique using large pictures and verbal narration -- at an event this month in Tokyo. Their goal: to prevent their experiences and ongoing hardships from being forgotten.

Titled "Fukushima Hisaichi Machi Monogatari Tokyo 7 Days" (literally Fukushima disaster area community stories Tokyo 7 days), the event will feature seven kamishibai performances across four days. Among the performers will be a group based in Koori, Fukushima Prefecture, whose members are victims of the ongoing nuclear disaster intent on keeping stories about their hometown of Namie, near the stricken nuclear plant, alive.

Yoshihiro Ozawa, 69, who was living in temporary housing in Koori after fleeing his home in Namie, founded the group in April 2014.

The impetus for organizing the group goes back to the spring of 2012, when a Hiroshima citizens' group called Machi Monogatari Seisaku Iinkai (Committee for community story production), which aims to invigorate communities through kamishibai, approached residents at the temporary housing facility. The Hiroshima group said it wanted to recreate an essay written by one of the housing facility's female residents in the traditional storytelling art form of kamishibai. Ozawa, who was the housing facility's

community leader at the time, helped to arrange the project. The group went on to also make kamishibai from Namie's folk tales, which eventually led to the founding of a kamishibai performance group centered on Ozawa.

Members of the newly founded group were all volunteers trying to preserve Namie's community bonds by performing kamishibai for the town's residents, who were scattered across the prefecture. Their performances enjoyed a good reputation and the group was soon invited to tell their stories in other prefectures such as Miyagi and Wakayama.

Wherever the group went to perform, Ozawa found that he was asked by audience members whether decontamination work had been completed in Namie, and how much longer he expected to stay in temporary housing. In fact, radiation levels are still high in much of Namie, which for the most part has been designated a "difficult-to-return" zone.

"People are starting to forget the reality that those of us who want to return to our homes are still unable to do so," lamented Ozawa. Meanwhile, the Hiroshima-based organization had begun to feel growing unease that the situation in Fukushima was fading in the minds of the general public. The concern of the Hiroshima group, which organized the upcoming event, synchronized with the angst felt by Ozawa and his fellow evacuees.

Kamishibai performed at the event will be set in a variety of areas in Fukushima Prefecture, and will involve the participation of groups comprising 2011 disaster victims in addition to Ozawa's. They will tell the stories of the aforementioned essay by a female evacuee, the town of Okuma when the troubled nuclear plant was first built there, and the efforts being made by the city of Iwaki to rebuild from tsunami damage.

The event will be held at the Rodo Kinko Kaikan building in Tokyo's Chiyoda Ward. There will be two performances each on March 7, 8 and 14, and one performance on March 15. Admission is 500 yen per performance. For more information, contact Machi Monogatari Seisaku Iinkai at 070-5527-3661 (in Japanese only).

March 04, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Fukushima/Ukraine on the same boat

March 5, 2015

Fukushima photos on exhibit in Ukraine

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150305_35.html

Mar. 5, 2015 - Updated 08:46 UTC+1

An exhibition of pictures of a disaster-stricken area in Fukushima Prefecture, northeastern Japan, after the March 2011 nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant has opened in Ukraine.

About 60 pieces by Japanese photojournalist Kazuma Obara are on display at a museum in Kiev, the Ukrainian capital, from Wednesday. The exhibit focuses on reconstruction efforts in Fukushima.

One photo shows workers cautiously packing large amount of soil in a bag, allowing a glimpse into the

large-scale decontamination work.

Another shows 3 workers in white full protective gear at a severely damaged facility of the nuclear plant.

Since the accident, Japan has deepened its post-nuclear disaster cooperation with Ukraine, which experienced the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident. They have worked together in areas such as measures against health damage to residents.

A man at the exhibition said he felt people in Fukushima live with the same kind of anxiety that Ukrainians experienced. He said he hopes people in Fukushima can overcome the disaster.

Obara said at the exhibit that learning about the situation in Fukushima could lead to some kind of cooperation between Ukrainians and Japanese.

Labor shortage for new factories

March 5, 2015

Workers still scarce at factories in village near Fukushima No. 1

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/05/national/workers-still-scarce-at-factories-in-village-near-fukushima-no-1/#.VPgaly51Cos>

JJI

KAWAUCHI, FUKUSHIMA PREF. – A labor shortage has been plaguing new factories in areas near the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Thanks to efforts by the central and prefectural governments to create jobs to prepare for the return of locals who evacuated because of the nuclear crisis, businesses opened factories in the village of Kawauchi, close to Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s shattered facility.

But the factories are suffering from a lack of workers due chiefly to delays in the return of evacuees, especially young people. In addition, some workers quit after finding themselves unsuited for the new jobs.

All areas of Kawauchi were warned to evacuate soon after the March 2011 nuclear catastrophe started. An evacuation advisory is still in place in part of the village.

In November 2012, Kikuchi Seisakusho Co. of Hachioji, western Tokyo, started operations at a factory converted from a high school in an area of Kawauchi where the evacuation advisory has been lifted.

As the factory is only about 20 minutes by car from the Tomioka interchange on the Joban Expressway, which connects the Tokyo metropolitan area with the Tohoku region, it is convenient in terms of bringing in materials and shipping products.

The biggest problem, however, is the shortage of labor.

The factory hired about 30 Kawauchi residents at the start of operations to support reconstruction, a senior official of Kikuchi Seisakusho said. Before the crisis, many of them had agricultural jobs or worked at supermarkets.

More than 10 workers quit within about two years.

"Many left as they couldn't get used to the factory work," said Kenichi Sato, the factory manager.

The factory casts high-end aluminum products using cutting-edge equipment. Finishing processes are done by hand.

There are few people with manufacturing experience in Kawauchi, and "it takes five to six years to train newcomers," Sato said.

Although the factory hopes to eventually operate at full capacity, the current rate is about two-thirds.

Four businesses, including Kikuchi Seisakusho and a furniture maker, launched operations in the village after the central government began lifting evacuation advisories in September 2011.

Six companies have decided to open new bases in a Kawauchi industrial park, whose construction will start in fiscal 2015 thanks partly to government subsidies.

The industrial park is expected to create at least 150 jobs as four more firms are likely to launch operations there.

A village official in charge of reconstruction voiced concerns, however, saying it is unclear if the full 150 workers can be secured.

As of the beginning of last month, 1,584 residents, or 60 percent of the total population, had returned to the village. Of them, 70 percent are 65 or older.

The village official underlined the importance of a comprehensive approach, noting that not only efforts to build new factories but also decontamination work, support in changing careers and help in finding homes are necessary.

Against this backdrop, the Kawauchi Municipal Government plans to build new homes near the industrial park in a bid to accelerate the return of residents and attract newcomers.

Fukushima disaster a "fading fear"?

March 4, 2015

Fukushima fears no longer a drag on tourism

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/05/national/fukushima-fears-no-longer-a-drag-on-tourism/#.VPgZwi51Cos>

by Anne Beade

AFP-JIJI

The 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster laid waste to Japan's tourism industry even as it left the Tohoku coastline in ruins, killed thousands and sparking the worst nuclear crisis in a generation.

But four years later, tourism is bouncing back, shattering expectations on visitor numbers largely owing to the weak yen and fading fears about the fallout from Fukushima No. 1.

Worries about radiation sent the number of visitors coming to Japan into a steep dive and the thought of attracting new tourists seemed an impossible goal in the days and weeks after the catastrophe struck.

But last year Japan logged a record 13.41 million international visitors, double the number of 2011 and more than half of the 20 million the government hopes to attract in 2020 when Tokyo hosts the Summer Olympics.

Receding fear over radiation and a sharp drop in the value of the yen — which has toned down Japan's reputation as a pricey destination — are helping to draw people like Buenos Aires native Jorge Santillan and his wife.

"That really influenced our decision," he said, referring to the exchange rate.

Since Prime Minister Shinzo Abe launched efforts to resuscitate the economy in early 2013, the yen has dropped 20 percent against the euro and about 40 percent against the dollar — making everything from sushi and sake to hotels and bullet trains a lot cheaper for visitors.

"We were checking the Internet and saw it was getting cheaper than before, and so we said 'Let's go!' " said French visitor Arnaud Cornillet.

Japan has come a long way from the televised images of tsunami-battered communities and workers in biohazard suits struggling to bring reactor meltdowns under control.

The Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) says the stigma of the Fukushima disaster has dropped significantly, though it has yet to fade completely.

But "we have said many times that radiation levels are absolutely insignificant in Tokyo and the main tourist areas," said JNTO official Mamoru Kobori.

"People understand that traveling, eating and living here don't pose a problem, as long as you avoid the restricted area around the Fukushima nuclear plant."

Industry minister Akihiro Ota believes 15 million visitors this year is a "realistic" target, aided by a pickup in regional tourism as visitors from Taiwan, South Korea and China flood luxury boutiques in Tokyo's Ginza shopping district.

That has been helped by the relaxation of visa restrictions despite often-tense diplomatic relations between Japan and its neighbors.

Japan's cuisine, traditional *ryokan* inns and the famous hot springs found in every corner of the country are top draws for visitors, said Mika Hatakeyama, Japan product manager at top-end French tourism agency Voyageurs du Monde.

"People who are delighted with (the country's) friendliness and hospitality are going back and (telling) others, so there is a word-of-mouth effect," she said, adding that Japan's reputation as a safe destination helped boost sales by 40 percent in 2014 from a year earlier.

But the surge in visitors is also straining key tourist spots to capacity, including in Kyoto, where hotels are often fully booked months in advance, Hatakeyama said.

As a result, efforts are being made to persuade tourists to head to less-visited areas of rural Japan.

"We recognize that further efforts have to be made to strengthen infrastructure" ahead of the Tokyo Games, said the JNTO's Kobori. "Building permit applications are booming and, according to our numbers, there should be 10,000 additional hotel rooms in Tokyo alone by 2020."

While Japan is aiming for tourism numbers similar to Britain or Turkey, at around 30 million annually, it would still remain a shadow of world leader France with its 80 million visitors.

2020: Baseball and local food in Fukushima?

March 4, 2015

Fukushima makes 2020 Olympics pitch for baseball, and local food

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/04/national/olympics-fukushima-makes-pitch-2020-baseball-local-food/#.VPbjVC51Cos>

AFP-JIJI

Fukushima Prefecture, which was hit by one of the world's worst-ever nuclear disasters in 2011, wants to host baseball and softball games at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics — and hopes to convince athletes to eat the local food.

The sports were dropped from the Olympic program after 2008 but are tipped to be voted back in by the International Olympic Committee next year, given their popularity in Japan.

"If baseball and softball return to the Olympics, and preliminary games are played outside Tokyo, then we hope to be able to stage games," said Hiroaki Kuwajima, an official with the Fukushima Municipal Government.

"We are still in the process of recovery from the disaster and it would be a dream to have world-class athletes play here."

Fukushima has suffered a lot of financial damage caused by misinformation," he said. "We would like to be able to sweep away those harmful rumors. Fukushima has venues capable of hosting these games."

Fukushima Prefecture is also keen on holding Olympic training camps and wants overseas athletes and fans to eat locally produced food, despite concerns over radiation levels. The city of Fukushima is just 60 km away from the crippled nuclear reactors.

"Fukushima's produce is safe and will be safe," insisted Kuwajima. "Of course we would like athletes and visitors from overseas to eat our food."

Fukushima's sprawling J-Village sports facility, where the Japan soccer team used to train, is also set to be restored in time for the 2020 Olympics after being converted into a base camp for thousands of workers deployed for the massive cleanup operation following the nuclear crisis.

"JFA (Japan Football Association) President (Kuniya) Daini wants the J-Village training camp to be fixed up and as a prefecture we are anxious to restore it," said Kuwajima. "Some people might be a little concerned about Fukushima, but once athletes and fans come, they will see that it is safe."

Fukushima has already expressed a desire to be part of the 2020 Olympics, along with Iwate and Miyagi, the two other Tohoku region prefectures that were the worst hit by the 2011 triple disaster.

Rise in the rate of blood clots in evacuees

March 5, 2015

FOUR YEARS AFTER: Blood problems continue to plague residents at temporary housing

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/quake_tsunami/AJ201503050078



Temporary housing for evacuees from the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, in Yamamoto, Miyagi Prefecture, on Dec. 31, 2014 (Asahi Shimbun file photo)

By SHINGO FUKUSHIMA/ Staff Writer

Cases of blood clots among evacuees living in temporary housing units in Iwate and Miyagi prefectures have risen significantly in the past four years, research shows.

Local doctors and a team from Niigata University have been examining the health of evacuees who lost their homes in the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster.

The researchers include Shinsaku Ueda, a doctor at the Japanese Red Cross Ishinomaki Hospital, Kazuhiro Sasaki, a doctor at the Morioka Municipal Hospital, and Kazuhiko Hanzawa, a lecturer at Niigata University's School of Medicine.

Diagnoses via ultrasound made shortly after the disaster in the city of Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, revealed that 7.1 percent of evacuees had **blood clots in veins in their calves. The rate continued to rise for those who subsequently moved into temporary housing, hitting 18.4 percent in 2014.**

However, the rate remained stable at 8.1 percent for those who were able to return home, suggesting a lack of exercise among those who lost their jobs and homes played a major factor in the increase.

In Iwate Prefecture, the ratio of residents with blood clots in 2014 was 12.7 percent, up nearly three-fold from 4.3 percent in autumn 2011. In the coastal town of Otsuchi, the rate tripled to 13.1 percent during the period.

Blood clots often form due to a lack of physical activity, and can result in sudden death if blood vessels in the lungs become blocked, known as pulmonary embolism and commonly called "economy class syndrome."

The study was published on the Japanese Association for Disaster Medicine forum.

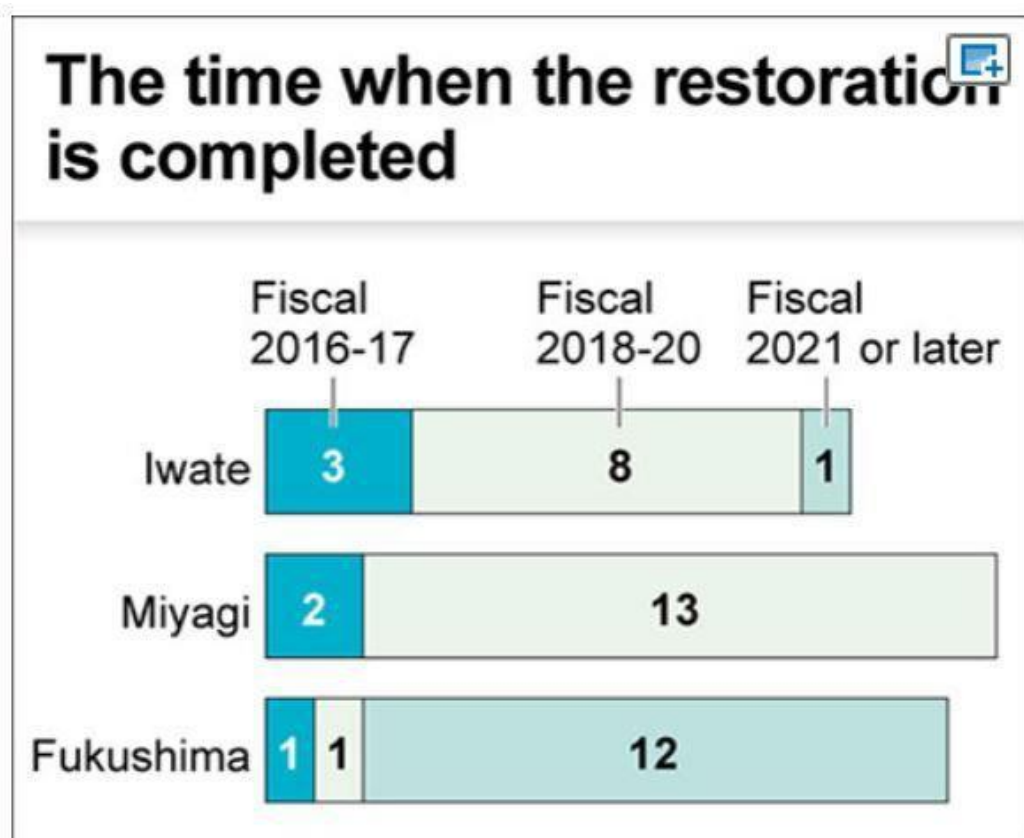
Referring to the phenomenon of "lonely deaths" among the elderly at temporary housing communities where there is nobody there to look after them, Ueda said, "The risk of 'kodokushi' and declining health will most certainly be increasing."

Different timetables for complete restoration

March 6, 2015

FOUR YEARS AFTER: 80% of Fukushima municipalities expect full restoration in fiscal 2021 or later

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201503060044>



The Asahi Shimbun

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Hampered by radiation contamination, about 80 percent of disaster-hit municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture will need until at least fiscal 2021 to completely restore their areas, an Asahi Shimbun survey showed.

In comparison, most municipalities in the two other prefectures, Iwate and Miyagi, that were damaged in the 2011 disaster said restoration work should be completed between fiscal 2018 and 2020, according to the survey results released on March 6.

Tamotsu Baba, mayor of Namie in Fukushima Prefecture, summed up the reason behind the different timetables among the prefectures.

“The progress of decontamination work is slow,” Baba said.

Namie is only 4 kilometers from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The Asahi Shimbun sent questionnaires to the leaders of 42 municipalities--12 in Iwate Prefecture and 15 each in Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures--that were damaged by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, or subject to evacuation orders after the nuclear accident unfolded.

Responses were received in February.

The central government has set the five years to fiscal 2015 as the “period for intensive restoration work” and the subsequent five years to fiscal 2020 as the “period for restoration work.”

However, 13 municipal leaders in the survey expect work to extend beyond the central government’s schedule, saying restoration will be completed in fiscal 2021 or later. Of them, 12 were in Fukushima Prefecture and one was in Iwate Prefecture.

Six municipalities said restoration will be completed from fiscal 2016 to 2017.

Twenty-two municipalities--eight in Iwate, 13 in Miyagi and one in Fukushima--said the work should end between fiscal 2018 and 2020.

None replied that restoration will be finished in fiscal 2015.

The head of Shinchi in Fukushima Prefecture was the only one who did not reply.

The prefectural governments of Iwate and Miyagi plan to build a total of 22,000 houses for disaster victims. They expect 35 percent will be completed within fiscal 2014, which ends later this month.

The completion rate will likely rise to 69 percent by the end of fiscal 2015 and further to 91 percent by the end of fiscal 2016, they said.

“The JR Onagawa Station (in Miyagi Prefecture) will resume its operations on March 21,” Onagawa Mayor Yoshiaki Suda said.

“Besides, road construction is making progress in the central part of our town.”

Fifteen of the 42 leaders said the earthquake, tsunami or the nuclear accident will “accelerate” population declines in their municipalities. Ten others also said the disasters will accelerate population declines but to a lesser degree.

“We have to take measures that lead evacuees to have hope for their future return (to their hometowns),” said Shiro Izawa, mayor of Futaba in Fukushima Prefecture.

(This article was written by Satoshi Kimura, Eiichi Tsunozu and Keisuke Sato.)

Olympic flame to burn through Tohoku

March 4, 2015

OLYMPICS/ Runners to carry 2020 torch through quake-ravaged Tohoku

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/sports/AJ201503040059



The last runners of the 1964 Olympic torch relay are seen in Fukushima on Sept. 30, 1964. (Asahi Shimbun file photo)

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The Olympic flame will burn brightly throughout the Tohoku region when the torch relay for the 2020 Tokyo Games travels through areas that were devastated by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

The organizing committee for the Olympics and Paralympics submitted a plan in February to the International Olympic Committee stipulating the torch's route through northeastern Japan. The relay will also pass through World Heritage sites and other tourist spots.

The torch relay is scheduled to begin in the spring of 2020 ahead of the July 24-Aug. 9 Olympic Games. Further details will be announced by 2017.

Committee officials said their plan was presented by Toshiro Muto at an IOC board meeting that was held through Feb. 28 in Rio de Janeiro.

The plan, which was well received by the IOC, underscored the importance of improving the Paralympics. The Paralympics were held in Tokyo in 1964, and the 2020 event will mark the first time the international competition for athletes with an impairment will be hosted twice by the same city.

The organizers plan to appoint personnel related to the Paralympics to major committee posts to discuss issues surrounding the Paralympic and the Olympic Games.

The plan stated that in 2018 the committee will begin recruiting volunteers from universities nationwide to work at both events.

It also said the athlete's village will "provide athletes with opportunities to experience diverse Japanese cultures, hospitality and the 'Cool Japan' phenomenon."

Tickets for the Olympics and the Aug. 25-Sept. 6 Paralympics will go on sale in 2019.

The committee said it will file a plan by 2016 on how the various Olympic venues will be utilized after the Games are completed.

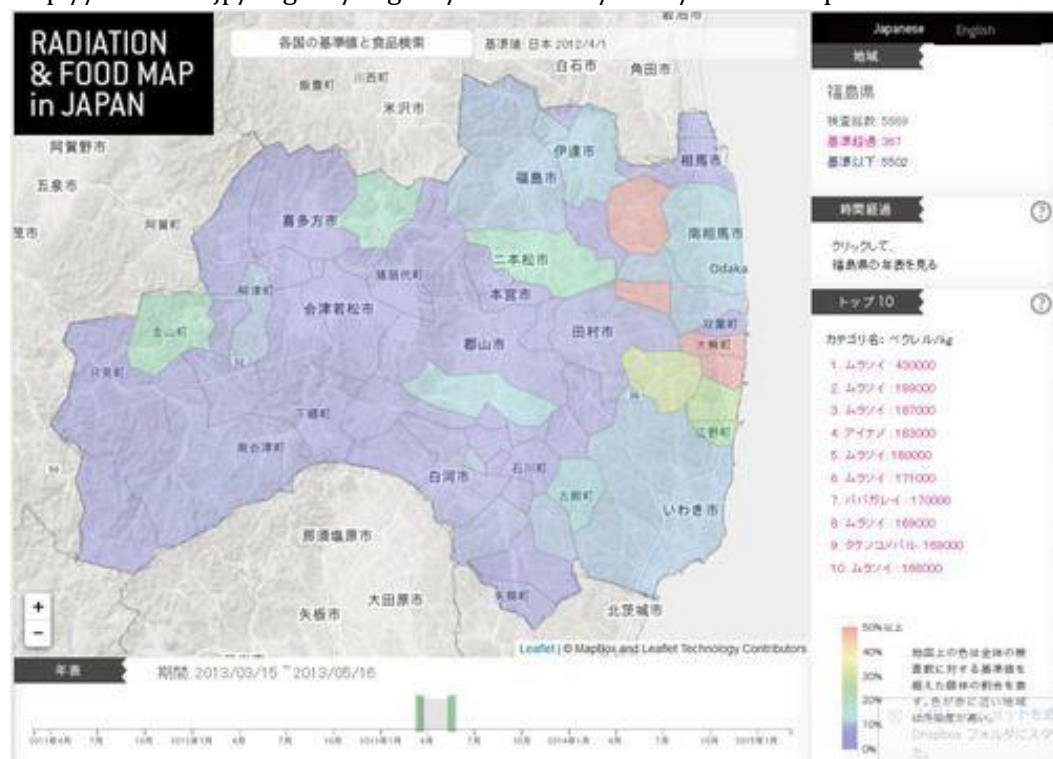
Elsewhere, Hiromi Kawamura, organizing committee manager in charge of culture and education, was appointed March 3 to the IOC secretariat in Lausanne, Switzerland. Kawamura's stint begins on April 1.

Interactive map of food radiation levels

March 6, 2015

University releases interactive map of Japanese food radiation levels

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150306p2a00m0na012000c.html>



The map showing food radiation amounts by area is seen in this screenshot. (Image from Tokyo Polytechnic University software design laboratory website)

A software design lab at Tokyo Polytechnic University has released an **interactive online map of radiation levels in Japanese foods by production area, based on measurements taken since the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster.**

Different colors are used to separate areas based on the proportion of foods from those areas that have exceeded radiation safety standards during screenings.

"I want people to see for themselves how safe their food is," said associate professor Yasushi Noguchi, 44, who developed the map.

The Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare regularly posts screening results for radioactive cesium in food, while Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) posts results for Fukushima Prefecture's marine products.

However, the results are merely displayed as lists of readings and times. **Noguchi wanted to apply his knowledge in computer programming and design to combine the figures and display them in an accessible format.**

With the assistance of students, Noguchi harvested **data from the ministry and TEPCO**, and also obtained the radiation safety standards of various countries and regions. Over the course of about a year, he set up a system to display radiation levels for different products by area following the 2011 nuclear disaster.

Radiation safety standards for Japan, the United States, Ukraine (where Chernobyl is located) and Europe can be compared for various products. The map can be viewed at

http://foodradiation.org/map/index_e.html

March 06, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Last minute effort to identify victims

March 7, 2015

FOUR YEARS AFTER: Police race against time to ID 83 bodies ahead of Tohoku disaster anniversary

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201503070012

By NORIHIKO KUWABARA/ Staff Writer

On the eve of the fourth anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake, police are accelerating efforts to identify the remains of 83 victims in the three hardest-hit prefectures by examining photographs of the bodies and their belongings.

As of March 6, prefectural police are still trying to identify 64 sets of remains in Iwate, 18 in Miyagi and one in Fukushima. With time running out to the anniversary on March 11, the Tohoku Regional Police Bureau has also distributed a poster featuring facial sketches of the victims and asking for information on their identities.

Miyagi prefectural police's special task team has so far located 9,519 victims of the deadly magnitude-9 earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011. Currently staffed by eight officers, the team is still working to identify the remaining 64 bodies.

The remains have been cremated, so the only leads they have are the photos of the victims' bodies and their limited belongings. In January, the team started reviewing all the pictures of the victims in hopes of finding clues that have been overlooked, such as small moles and scars.

There is a high probability that officers missed minor clues simply because they had to handle so many bodies shortly after the disaster.

The team members are now engaged in painstaking work to compare these new discoveries with photographs of 450 people who remain missing since the disaster in the prefecture.

Their efforts bore fruit on Feb. 23 when police returned the ashes of Yukiko Abe, a resident of Onagawa, Miyagi Prefecture, who was 66 at the time of the disaster, to her bereaved family.

Poring over pictures of Abe's body, the team found moles on her left cheek and chin, which became clues to piecing together her identity. Her artificial tooth became the final determining factor.

While police have identified many of the bodies through DNA profiling, it has become increasingly difficult to obtain blood and other samples from bereaved families of victims with the passing of time.

Miyagi police's team has also compared DNA from victims with those of the relatives of missing people. An investigator recently matched the DNA from a body to that of a brother of Kyoko Sasaki, a resident of Minami-Sanriku, Miyagi Prefecture, who was 59 when she went missing. Her cremated remains were returned to her family on Feb. 25.

To address the dwindling number of responses from the public with information, Tohoku Regional Police Bureau, which oversees the three prefectural police departments, has recently handed out 1,500 copies of a poster that features facial sketches and detailed information on 25 of the 83 unidentified victims.

The posters, the first such effort, have been placed at police stations, government facilities, train stations and highway rest areas in 12 prefectures in the Tohoku and Kanto regions. About 30,000 evacuees from the disaster-stricken areas now reside in the Kanto region.

The number of contacts from the public with victim-related information has dwindled from 21 in 2013 to 12 in 2014 in Miyagi Prefecture.

Iwate prefectural police were contacted 40 to 50 times with information between June and December 2013, but the figure dropped to just two times in 2014.

Each of the victim's profile is accompanied by a bar code, which links to the bureau's homepage that provide more detailed information, such as the deceased's sex, age bracket, clothing and other belongings. The homepages also feature available information on the other 58 victims, such as locations where their bodies were found.

61% of evacuees still in temporary housing

March 7, 2015

FOUR YEARS AFTER: More than 60% of evacuees still stuck in temporary housing

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201503070036>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Sixty-one percent of those made homeless by the 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster are still living in temporary housing, an Asahi Shimbun survey shows.

The Asahi Shimbun sent questionnaires to nearly 1,000 people from the hardest-hit northeastern prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima, and received 628 responses.

By prefecture, 59 percent of the Iwate respondents lived in temporary housing. The figure was 58 percent for Miyagi Prefecture and 66 percent for Fukushima Prefecture.

When a similar survey was conducted in 2012, just one year after the disasters, all of the respondents were living in temporary housing. In 2013, the figure was 87 percent, while last year it was 76 percent. The latest survey showed that 61 percent of respondents are living in temporary housing units, private-sector apartments rented out by the municipal government, public housing or with relatives.

Most of the Fukushima respondents were no longer residing in the municipalities they called home before the 2011 calamity, but an increasing number had moved out of temporary housing over the past year and made a new start elsewhere.

Only 26 percent of the respondents rebuilt or moved into new homes on their original plot. Just 3 percent were able to enter public housing units constructed by local governments for those who do not have the resources to rebuild.

Those still living in temporary housing were asked how long they thought they would have to endure the living arrangement. Twenty-eight percent said one more year, while 19 percent said two more years.

Thirteen percent said they would need more than two years.

Respondents were asked to grade the stage of rebuilding in their local communities and the progress made in picking up the threads of their former lives. A rating of 1 meant conditions are as they were immediately after the magnitude-9.0 earthquake and nuclear accident, while a rating of 10 meant things are as they were before the March 11, 2011, disaster.

The overall average grade for rebuilding local communities was 4, while the overall average for rebuilding respondents' lives was 5.

However, while the average grades for personal rebuilding for Iwate and Miyagi prefectures were 5.5 and 5.4, respectively, the average grade for Fukushima was 4.1.

"There has been absolutely no progress in rebuilding Okuma, (Fukushima Prefecture)," said a 39-year-old homemaker with three children in elementary school who gave her community a 1 for rebuilding. "It feels as though time has stopped from four years ago."

Located in Okuma, which co-hosts the stricken Fukushima plant, the woman's home is in an area designated as being difficult for residents to return to. She now lives in temporary housing in Aizu-Wakamatsu.

"I feel sorry for my children because I have no idea where they will attend their Coming-of-Age Day ceremony," she said.

Meanwhile, close to 80 percent of the respondents said they felt a level of disparity had developed in the rebuilding and in support to disaster victims.

Respondents were asked what areas they wanted the central and local governments to focus on in providing support to disaster victims.

The most frequent response at 41 percent was "subsidies for medical expenses," while 32 percent said "financial support for rebuilding our homes." Other areas with high priority were "subsidies for monthly living expenses" at 30 percent and "improved elderly care services and rebuilding or new construction of welfare facilities" at 27 percent.

Photos of pain and terror

March 7, 2015

Fukushima photographer exhibits pre-disaster pictures to share what 3/11 took away

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150307p2a00m0na007000c.html>

Nearly four years after the Fukushima nuclear disaster, an amateur photographer is sharing her collection of photographs taken before the disaster to show the public the extent of what the disaster took away. Chiyoiko Kanno, 68, was a nurse in Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, before the March 2011 nuclear disaster forced the evacuation of the area, including the adjacent village of Iitate. **From the summer of 2010 through the winter of 2011, Kanno had photographed the daily lives of Iitate villagers,** building up a collection of pictures. She says that none of them minded being in front of the camera. **"Everyone smiled,** and when I was done taking pictures they gave me vegetables to take home with me," she recalls.

Her photos include farmers smiling with their Japanese radishes in hand, an old lady walking with a goat, and children playing in a river, their faces full of life. Just when she was thinking of opening an exhibition to show people these photos, the nuclear disaster hit.

After the disaster, Kanno evacuated to Tochigi Prefecture. Still, when she finds time she returns to Fukushima Prefecture and visits the people from Iitate who live in temporary housing, taking their pictures while listening to their stories. She discovered that the woman with the goat had to get rid of it when she evacuated out of Fukushima Prefecture. Another gave up on her practice of drying Japanese radishes, because the climate in her new location wasn't suitable.

Kanno also took a photo of two schoolgirls just after the disaster. Their eyes seem to criticize the adults of society.

"I want to express the pain of being chased from my land and the terror of the disaster," says Kanno.

Kanno's photos have already been displayed in several places across Japan, including Sapporo and Kobe.

Starting March 6, they went on display at "Gallery Kadokura" in Maebashi, in their **13th exhibition.**

The Maebashi exhibition runs through March 12 and admission is free.

March 07, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Many schools not rebuilt

March 8, 2015

FOUR YEARS AFTER: Many schools still not rebuilt due to rising costs, other priorities

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201503080015>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

For students who entered Unosumai Elementary School in Kamaishi, Iwate Prefecture, after the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, they will attend classes in prefabricated buildings for six years until graduation.

The school, located near the sea, was swallowed up by the ensuing tsunami, although all the 350 students were safely evacuated to a hillside.

Unosumai is among the many elementary and junior high schools damaged in the earthquake and tsunami that have experienced delays in rebuilding.

The large number of public works projects currently ongoing in the disaster-hit areas have resulted in a rise in the costs of construction materials and a serious shortage of workers.

Priorities have also been placed on large-scale projects, such as construction of roads ordered by the central government. Subsequently, reconstruction of school buildings has been put on the back burner. At Unosumai Elementary, 182 students are studying in prefabricated buildings, as reconstruction of their school has yet to be started.

As prices of concrete and labor costs of workers have jumped in a short period of time, the costs of the reconstruction plan worked out in spring 2014 ballooned. As a result, the central government did not approve the plan.

In a process that took six months, the Kamaishi city government decreased the construction budget by making changes, including scaling back the school buildings. It also introduced a special bidding process that selected contractors from the design stage.

Despite those efforts, the school buildings are not expected to be completed until 2017, which means classes will continue in the prefabricated buildings.

“Though the school buildings are prefabricated ones, children are enjoying their school lives,” said Chizuko Kobayashi, 41, whose three daughters are attending Unosumai Elementary School.

The school bus that transports children from temporary housing facilities to the school passes through districts that were devastated by the tsunami. Because of that, when a tsunami warning is issued, students sometimes have to stay at the prefabricated school buildings until late at night.

“I hope that the school buildings that children can attend safely are constructed as early as possible,” Kobayashi said.

According to the Iwate prefectural government, of the 15 schools damaged by the tsunami, Funakoshi Elementary School in Yamada completed reconstruction of its school buildings in spring 2014.

The school buildings of Takata High School in Rikuzentakata are also scheduled to be completed late this month.

However, students in the remaining 13 elementary or junior high schools in five municipalities are still studying in prefabricated buildings or using buildings of former schools.

The reconstruction of Otsuchi Elementary School and Otsuchi Junior High School in Otsuchi, Takata-Higashi Junior High School in Rikuzentakata, and Okirai Elementary School in Ofunato are likely to be delayed for six months or more as municipal governments have failed to secure contractors in the bidding process.

In neighboring Miyagi Prefecture, 15 elementary and junior high schools are still using prefabricated buildings or other facilities. It is taking time for many of them and two public high schools to choose new sites for their schools or complete reconstruction of their buildings.

Completion of the new Yuriage Elementary School and Yuriage Junior High School in Natori are likely to be delayed until April 2018. A relocation site for Okawa Elementary School in Ishinomaki also has yet to be determined.

(This article was written by Eiichiro Suganuma and Masataka Yamaura.)

Fresh financing plan from GOv't for reconstruction

March 8, 2015

Gov't eyes additional 6 tril. yen for post-quake reconstruction

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150308p2g00m0dm034000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The government will allocate about 6 trillion yen (\$50 billion) for a five-year period starting in fiscal 2016 to reconstruction work in the northeastern region affected by the massive earthquake and tsunamis in March 2011, sources familiar with the matter said Saturday.

The fresh financing plan for the disaster-afflicted areas, to be finalized as early as June, would bring the **state's total spending for the quake reconstruction to over 30 trillion yen.**

The budget for the "latter term" of the 10-year period of recovery from the natural disaster, which also triggered the Fukushima nuclear crisis, will be financed without any new tax hike for the purpose.

The central government is relying on various tax hikes and asset sales to fund about 26 trillion yen of disaster reconstruction spending through March 2016.

It now expects that cuts in other budgets, increases in tax revenues in line with an economic improvement and money from local governments' coffers will be enough to secure 6 trillion yen for the five-year period from April 2016 to March 2021, the sources said.

Of the 6 trillion yen, 5 trillion yen will likely go to projects to improve disaster preparedness in the hardest-hit prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima, and provide more housing for those who have lost their homes in those prefectures.

The government aims to complete the rebuilding work in 10 years following the quake except for areas devastated by the nuclear accident in Fukushima Prefecture, expecting its financial support through March 2021 will pave the way for the disaster-hit areas to become financially self-reliant.

But **local governments are demanding that the state continue shouldering the entire spending for the region's rebuilding.**

The Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima governments say their prefectures alone need a bigger budget for additional rebuilding and disaster prevention projects.

March 08, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Few have returned

March 7, 2015

Few residents back in areas reopened after Fukushima disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150307p2a00m0na009000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- Few residents have returned to two Fukushima Prefecture areas whose evacuation orders were lifted last year, population checks by local municipalities have indicated.

An evacuation order for the eastern part of the village of Kawauchi was lifted in October last year, as was an order for the eastern part of the Miyakoji district of the city of Tamura in April last year.

As of Jan. 1 this year, the Kawauchi quarter's population stood at just 10.5 percent of its registered level. The Tamura section, meanwhile, had only 39.1 percent of its registered population as of the end of November.

The lack of progress in the return of residents to these two quarters is likely to spur discussion on how to encourage people to return to areas where the government plans to lift evacuation orders.

The registered population of Kawauchi as of Jan. 1 this year was 2,739 people, but an investigation by the municipal government found that only 1,581 people actually lived there. Looking only at the eastern section that had its evacuation order removed last year, there was a registered population of 275 people as of June last year, but as of Jan. 1 only 29 people actually lived there.

The eastern part of Tamura's Miyakoji district had a registered population of 340, but only 133 people -- 39.1 percent of the registered figure -- were actually living there when officials checked at the end of November last year.

At the time of the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011, the registered population was 380. Using this as a reference point, the proportion of people who have returned stands at 35 percent.

The return of young people, especially, has been slow, due to concerns about employment and lingering radiation, and the populations of these municipalities have become more slanted toward the elderly. Looking at the whole of Kawauchi, 35.1 percent of the village's population was classed as elderly at the time of the disaster in March 2011, but as of January this year the level had reached 39.8 percent. The corresponding figures for the Miyakoji district were 32.7 percent before the disaster and 34.6 percent afterward.

Hideo Akimoto, chief of the Kawauchi Municipal Government's recovery policy section, commented, "We had seen steady depopulation and graying of the population. This surged after the earthquake disaster. It feels like time has advanced by 20 years."

An official at the Tamura Municipal Government said, "Many people have moved their lives to their evacuation locations, finding work, schools and places to shop there."

March 07, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Education campaign to start on nuke waste disposal

March 8, 2015

Gov't to hold campaign on nuclear waste disposal sites

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150308p2g00m0dm026000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The Japanese government is planning to carry out an education campaign in major cities nationwide about the necessity of building facilities for the final disposal of high-level nuclear waste generated at power plants, sources close to the matter said Saturday.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's administration is looking to restart nuclear plants shut down after the March 2011 Fukushima Daiichi accident, and has faced criticism over **promoting nuclear power without resolving where the waste should ultimately be disposed.**

Symposiums are planned for Sapporo, Sendai, Tokyo, Nagoya, Osaka, Fukuoka and roughly four other cities, hosted by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry together with the Nuclear Waste Management Organization of Japan, which had previously been solely responsible for the disposal plan. NUMO had held symposiums in Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya in the 2013 fiscal year and in 30 of the country's 47 prefectural capitals in the following year, but participation was weak, with an average of 60 people turning up to each symposium.

Its staff will now be joined by ministry officials explaining the disposal plan, as well as representatives of power companies if deemed necessary, the sources said.

The government is also considering launching an **information campaign on social networking services**, with the details to be discussed at an economy ministry task force meeting set for Tuesday, the sources said.

The current disposal policy, adopted in 2008, calls for waste to be vitrified and placed in facilities deep underground. Revisions to the policy at the end of the month are expected to include the selection of candidate sites on scientific grounds, without waiting for local authorities to volunteer to host the facilities.

See also :

Government to start campaign on nuclear waste disposal sites

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/08/national/government-start-campaign-nuclear-waste-disposal-sites/#.VPwwS-F1Cos>



Protesters hold up placards at a rally Sunday in Tokyo to denounce atomic power plants. | AFP-JIJI

Kyodo

The government plans to launch a campaign in major cities to promote the need for permanent disposal facilities for high-level nuclear waste from power plants, sources close to the matter said Saturday. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's administration is looking to restart nuclear plants shut after the Fukushima disaster, and has faced criticism over promoting nuclear power without resolving where the waste will ultimately be disposed.

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Temporary housing: 37% of elderly

March 9, 2015

Elderly make up 37% in public housing for Tohoku disaster victims

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/09/national/social-issues/elderly-make-37-public-housing-tohoku-disaster-victims/#.VP1pZOF1Cot>

Kyodo

Some 37.2 percent of the disaster victims still living in temporary public housing in the three prefectures hit hardest by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami are 65 or older, and roughly a quarter of the households are composed of individuals living alone.

In Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures, the percentage of elderly people in public housing complexes for disaster victims who can't rebuild their homes on their own was higher than the Tohoku region average of 25.5 percent, according to a survey by Kyodo News.

In the survey covering 8,432 people living in 4,069 public housing units, 3,136 people in 2,301 units were aged 65 or older as of the end of January. The average age was 50.

Since the earthquake and tsunami that triggered the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant, around 30,000 housing units for disaster victims have been planned for construction, mainly in the three prefectures.

Amid the continuing aging of the residents, the survey results point to the importance of sustaining their mental and physical well-being and strengthening their community bonds.

Ahead of the fourth anniversary of the disasters on Wednesday, Iwate had the highest figure — at 41.9 percent — of residents in disaster public housing aged 65 or older, followed by 37.1 percent in Fukushima and 35.6 percent in Miyagi.

The survey found that 987 elderly people, or 24.3 percent of the total households in disaster public housing, were living alone. Five elderly people have so far died unattended.

Japan has also been struggling to address the issue of elderly people dying alone in the aftermath of the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake. The cumulative number of unattended deaths has reached more than 1,000 in the western Japan disaster.

6.7% reduction in the population of disaster-hit area

March 9, 2015

FOUR YEARS AFTER: Population shrinks by 92,000 in 39 disaster-hit municipalities

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201503090037>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The population of 39 municipalities ravaged in the 2011 disaster shrank by 92,000, or 6.7 percent, over four years, a rate more than eight times faster than Japan's overall population decline, an Asahi Shimbun survey showed.

Of the 42 local governments surveyed, only the Miyagi prefectural capital of Sendai and its two neighboring municipalities, the town of Rifu and Natori city, saw their populations increase following the disaster.

The decrease in the remaining municipalities included residents who were among the nearly 16,000 people killed when the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami devastated the Tohoku coast on March 11, 2011.

The Asahi Shimbun compared the number of resident registrations in 42 cities, towns and villages in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures on March 1 or Feb. 28, 2011, shortly before the disaster, with those on Feb. 1 or Jan. 31 this year.

The municipalities included coastal areas hit by the earthquake and tsunami and those in Fukushima Prefecture that were evacuated after the accident unfolded at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The coastal town of Onagawa, Miyagi Prefecture, had the largest population decline, of 29.1 percent. The town still lacks employment opportunities and necessary infrastructure, forcing residents to continue moving out, an Onagawa official said.

The internal affairs ministry estimates Japan's overall population shrank by 0.8 percent during the four-year period. The average rate of decline in the 40 prefectures that saw shrinking populations was 1.7 percent.

Ten municipalities surveyed had population declines exceeding 10 percent. Six are located along the coasts of Iwate and Miyagi prefectures, including Rikuzentakata, Otsuchi and Minami-Sanriku, whose urban centers were destroyed by the tsunami.

Reconstruction of housing remains nowhere in sight in many of these municipalities.

The remaining four municipalities are in Fukushima Prefecture, including the town of Futaba, which co-hosts the crippled Fukushima No. 1 power plant. These municipalities have areas designated as "difficult-to-return zones," where high radiation levels will likely prevent residents from returning for a long time. Sendai and the two nearby municipalities saw a combined population increase of more than 30,000 people over the four years. Municipal officials cited an influx of residents from other disaster-affected areas and reconstruction projects that have drawn many workers from around Japan.

Delays in construction of public housing

March 9, 2015

Public housing for Fukushima facing delays

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Mar. 9, 2015 - Updated 10:33 UTC+1

Construction of public housing in Fukushima Prefecture is facing significant delays. The housing is meant for those forced to leave their homes after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, and the ensuing nuclear accident.

Fukushima Prefecture plans to build around 2,700 units for people affected by the earthquake and tsunami. 4,900 are planned for those affected by the nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant.

But only 44 percent of the units for quake and tsunami victims were ready for occupancy at the end of February.

Only 5 percent has been completed for the nuclear evacuees.

Prefectural officials say they are having difficulty securing land to build the housing. They say there is also a shortage of construction workers amid the growth in reconstruction-related demands.

The officials say it will take until 2018 or later to finish building all the units for the nuclear accident refugees.

Local communities are urging the prefecture to make the housing ready as quickly as possible. They say people living in temporary housing are being pushed to the limit of endurance.

The prefectural government is considering measures to speed up the process, such as buying housing units built by private companies.

Sagaya Sugawara, 4 years after

March 9, 2015

FOUR YEARS AFTER: Tsunami survivor who could not save mother finds role in life

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201503090009>

By MAKIKO SAITO/ ASAHI SHIMBUN WEEKLY AERA

It was still morning, but Sayaka Sugawara already felt it was “a special day that I will remember forever.” She had attended a graduation ceremony at her junior high school in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, said goodbye to her classmates of the past three years, and returned home.

Then the ground started shaking.

That “special day” was March 11, 2011.

Sugawara felt that she lost everything that day when the tsunami triggered by the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake destroyed her home and killed her mother, grandmother and great-grandmother.

Now 19, she overcame her misery, sense of insignificance and a perceived lack of compassion from others by returning to what she always loved to do: write.

As a third-grader in elementary school, she won a prize for an essay about her grandfather's pottery hobby. In junior high school, Sugawara put her thoughts together in a speech and became vice president of the student body.

However, her losses from the disaster took a toll on her sense of worth.

In May that year, she entered a senior high school in Sendai. Her classmates who were not affected by the quake and tsunami seemed to blame the fact that she lived near the ocean for her plight.

Unable to concentrate on her studies, her academic marks plummeted. Although she lived in a dorm, she had no one to talk to because the other students did nothing but study.

As Sugawara felt smaller and smaller, her grandfather, who had avoided the disasters because he was at work, told her: "You can get together with everyone again when you die. Let's do what we can right now."

In June that year, she wrote a composition about her experience in the disaster.

"From the standpoint of other people, I might be a pitiful senior high school student, but I do not feel that way," she wrote.

In her composition, Sugawara described how she was swallowed up in the cold, dark water that engulfed her home and had no idea how long she was in that situation; it felt like anywhere between five seconds and a minute.

She managed to survive by grabbing a piece of rubble. Soon, her mother was carried to the same point by the water, but she became trapped under debris.

The daughter desperately wanted to free her mother, but the debris was too heavy to budge. Thinking that a second tsunami would strike at any moment, Sugawara said, "I love you, Mom," and fled.

Her grandmother and great-grandmother also died at the home.

However, Sugawara's composition did not focus only on what she had lost.

"Because of that experience, I have been able to gain new opportunities," she wrote.

One such opportunity was the chance to talk about her experiences abroad, which helped her find a purpose in life.

At the Summer Davos event held in 2011 for young people and organized by the World Economic Forum, Sugawara met a student who survived the 2008 Sichuan earthquake in China.

"Japan is lucky because rebuilding is happening quickly," the Chinese student told Sugawara.

Sugawara said she then realized that people around the world were living in places much colder than the temporary housing provided to evacuees in the Tohoku region.

She also wanted disaster victims in Japan and abroad to become acquainted and find opportunities to help each other.

Soon thereafter, Sugawara was involved in establishing the group Hand Down Tohoku with other senior high school and university students who had experienced the disaster in 2011. The group's goal is to have members pass on their experiences to others.

Over the past three years, Sugawara has talked about her experiences about 60 times. But she has faced new problems because of those speeches.

One university professor who heard Sugawara speak asked her, "I heard this speech was about disaster management, but have you studied hazard maps?"

Sugawara plans to study such topics after she enters university in spring 2015.

She said her current knowledge may be too insufficient for those listening to her speeches to gain specific and beneficial information about disaster management techniques.

“Because Japanese are very serious, each individual seeks perfection,” she said. “But everyone has different things they can do or are good at. Even if one is an adult and the other a child, if they cooperate there might be more things they could do together.”

Sugawara said she has overcome the tendency among perfection-seeking Japanese to avoid taking that important first step.

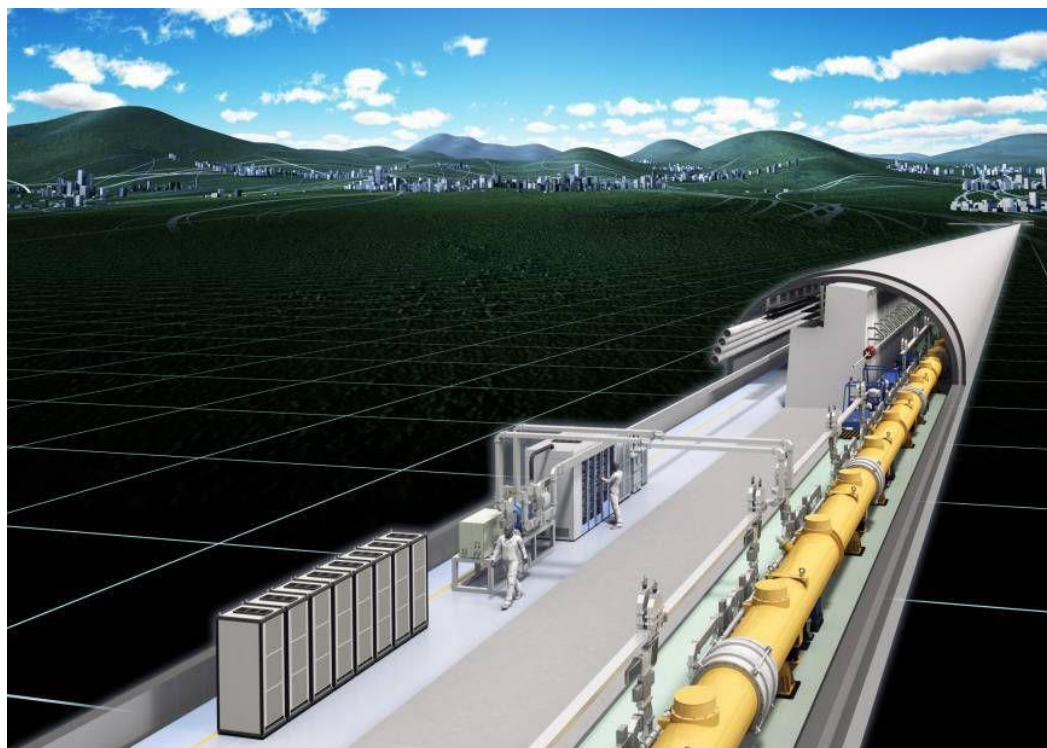
At her speeches, some audience members place their heads on the table and fall asleep. But other children have said to her, “I bought a whistle for disaster management.” Another said, “I will stop making excuses to my mother.”

Sugawara laments that her mother, grandmother and great-grandmother will not be with her when major events occur in her life, from entering university, to finding a job and getting married.

But her determination expressed in the composition she wrote three months after the disasters has not changed.

“I feel that I want to gain through the remainder of my life the same amount of things that I have lost,” she said.

Is this the future?



INTERNATIONAL LINEAR COLLIDER

Tohoku pins rebound hopes to atom smasher

by Tomohiro Osaki

Staff Writer

As the disaster-hit Tohoku region struggles to recover from the deadly tsunami four years ago, many residents have hopes for what is considered a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to galvanize the area's resurrection.

Chances are the region may host the International Linear Collider, a state-of-the-art research facility physicists worldwide hope will shed light on the secrets of the universe.

We look into the situation both at home and abroad surrounding the ILC and its potential impact on Japanese society.

What is the ILC?

The ILC is an unprecedented particle accelerator that must be built in an underground tunnel 30 to 50 km long. It is the brainchild of the Linear Collider Collaboration, a group of physicists from around the world. The much-anticipated international project calls for the accelerator to catapult two ultra-small particles — electrons and positrons — into each other head-on at close to the speed of light. The process will be repeated numerous times a second, around the clock.

Each successful collision will unleash a significant amount of energy for a split second and re-create the extremely high-energy state of the Big Bang that purportedly spawned the universe.

Construction of the facility is expected to cost about ¥830 billion.

What's the significance of the ILC experiment?

The high-energy reaction is expected to spark an array of particles considered relevant to the birth of the universe, including the recently discovered Higgs boson.

Scientists hope this Big Bang simulation will help explain some of the most profound mysteries in the universe, including its makeup and how it works. An estimated 95 percent of matter existing in the universe remains scientifically unaccounted for.

One chief objective of the ILC project is to delve into the mechanism of the Higgs boson, the “God particle” detected for the first time by scientists in the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) during an experiment conducted at the Large Hadron Collider in 2012.

The Higgs boson is thought to impart mass to other particles, meaning that without it, every single particle, for example those in a human body, would disperse at the speed of light.

The ILC, if built, will be the longest particle accelerator in the world, dethroning the LHC, which lies deep beneath the Franco-Swiss border near Geneva.

While the LHC smashes particles using a 27 km-long circular path — roughly equivalent to Tokyo's Yamanote Line — the ILC will be straight. A linear collision is considered more powerful than a circular one because curves reduce the speed of the particles.

What would be the potential societal impact if Japan hosts the ILC?

If the ILC is built in Japan, it will be the first international research institute Japan has hosted, according to Satoru Yamashita, an associate professor at the International Center for Elementary Particle Physics at the University of Tokyo.

It will be a major breakthrough in a country that has long suffered from a brain drain of local talent and help Japan regain global visibility in science and technology, Yamashita said.

But perhaps more significantly, the ILC would attract a swarm of foreign physicists and their families, creating a global community.

Nomura Research Institute estimates the facility will create 250,000 jobs over a 30-year period covering its construction (10 years) and operation (20 years), with the economic benefits over the same period likely to reach ¥4.3 trillion, according to the Tohoku Conference for the Promotion of the ILC, a regional group seeking to promote Japan's bid.

What are the chances of the ILC coming to Japan?

It seems the chances are quite high.

According to Yamashita, a consensus has been formed among physicists in the United States and Europe that it should be built in Japan.

The Particle Physics Project Prioritization Panel (P5), part of the U.S. Department of Energy's high-energy physics advisory group, said in its report last May that Japan's fledgling ILC initiative is an "exciting development," and recommended the U.S. "play a world-leading role in the ILC experimental program" should "this exciting scientific opportunity be realized in Japan."

Is there a nationwide movement to host the ILC?

So far, the domestic interest has largely been municipal, because the central government hasn't officially declared Japan's candidacy.

A panel of outside experts set up by the Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry is scrutinizing Japan's potential to host the facility and is likely to conclude the discussion by the end of the next fiscal year.

Japan will then discuss the panel's assessment with global leaders, and decide on its ILC acceptance and other details, Yamashita said.

Where in Japan would the ILC most likely be built?

A group of scholars and researchers determined in summer 2013 that the Kitakami mountains, which straddle three Tohoku prefectures — Aomori, Iwate and Miyagi — would be the best ILC location in Japan, ruling out the Sefuri mountains in Kyushu.

The Kitakami mountains, a large part of which lie in Iwate Prefecture, were judged ideal because their ground consists of layers of solid granite 50 km wide, long enough to accommodate the ILC.

An investigation by the group into geological conditions also confirmed there is no active fault running underneath that would trigger an earthquake.

What's the local response like?

Iwate Prefecture, for one, has strenuously campaigned for the ILC. It characterizes the project as a "once-in-a-lifetime" opportunity for the future of Tohoku, which is struggling to recover from the devastating quake and tsunami four years ago that killed nearly 19,000 people.

"We believe the ILC will not only enable us to regain what was lost in the disaster but to gain something new and make the Tohoku region something akin to an international hub of scientists," said Masataka Miya, chief of a team set up by the prefectural government for the hosting bid.

Miya said the project will boost science education for local children and provide new business opportunities to local manufacturing industries.

The prefecture set up a task force in 2013 to discuss how to make its communities more amenable to incoming foreign scientists and their families.

Among the topics under discussion are how to address the serious lack of full-time medical interpreters in local hospitals and where to school foreign children who accompany their parents, Miya said.

Any concerns?

Miya acknowledged that some residents are worried about the ILC's link to radiation.

The ILC accelerator releases radiation while it operates and the tunnel as a whole will be designated a radiation-controlled area.

The Advanced Accelerator Association Promoting Science & Technology (AAA), which campaigns for the ILC initiative in Japan, claims on its website the possibility of a radioactive substance leaking outside the facility is nearly zero, citing its watertight safety measures and full-time surveillance system.

However, in 2013, a proton accelerator facility called Japan Proton Accelerator Research Complex (J-PARC) in Ibaraki Prefecture malfunctioned and exposed 34 workers and researchers inside to radiation.

Yamashita from the University of Tokyo said the likelihood is low that a similar accident will befall the ILC, noting that electrons and positrons require only a thousandth of the radiation necessary to collide protons. Still, he added: "Radiation is such a fearful thing for many people that even the tiniest amount of it leaking is enough to frighten them. The fact that the facility needs only a limited amount of radiation does not make unnecessary robust safety precautions."

"Trapped with no way out" (Nuclear Watch)

March 5, 2015

Maintaining the Tragic Memories

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclearwatch/20150305.html>

Nearly 4 years after the Great East Japan Earthquake, NHK surveyed residents of the 3 hardest-hit prefectures. Of the more than 700 respondents, nearly 80 percent felt that the public's focus on the disaster and the ensuing nuclear accident is fading. One resident has dedicated himself to passing his experiences on to others, in a bid to keep the memories alive.

61-year-old Kenichi Hasegawa, a dairy farmer from the village of Iitate, in Fukushima prefecture, visited Hokkaido last month to share his experiences.

The nuclear accident forced him to destroy all of his milk cows.

"I was standing there in my empty cowshed, wondering what I could do... how I could support my family," Hasegawa said.

Dairy farmers in Iitate were not allowed to ship their milk because of the nuclear fallout.

They had no choice but to get rid of their cows, into which they had poured so much work and love. One tragedy fed off another.

"Had it not been for the nuclear plant..." is how a message written on a wall begins.

The message was left by a colleague of Hasegawa's who committed suicide three months after the disaster.

It was then that Hasegawa decided to start his speaking campaign in Japan and abroad to let people know about the dire situation in Fukushima.

"I thought to myself, 'This is absolutely unacceptable. Period. I have to tell everybody about this.' That's how I got started," Hasegawa said.

Hasegawa is concerned that the public may be losing interest in the tragic events of four years ago. And in the fact that the disasters are still casting a big shadow over peoples' lives.

Entries in his datebook record the 250 speeches he has given. He gave 100 in the first year after the disaster.

But now he gives only half as many.

"It's gradually fading away. The memory is slowly disappearing from the minds of the Japanese people. That's what I feel very strongly," Hasegawa said.

With an evacuation order still in effect, access to the entire village remains restricted. Amid all the uncertainty, Hasegawa made the major decision this winter to tear down his cowshed.

The move was prompted by the decision of his frustrated eldest son, who is in his 30s, to leave the village to start a dairy farm somewhere else.

None of his family members can foresee a time when they can return home. Despite all the turmoil, Hasegawa headed off to give another speech, this time in Tokyo.

"What can we do in such a tainted village?" Hasegawa asked. "There are no young people. What would the elderly do even if they were to return? That's the reality we have to face squarely."

Hasegawa stressed that **the people of his hometown share a feeling of being trapped, with no way out.**

"I am relieved to know that there are still people in Tokyo who care about us," Hasegawa said. "I hope they will help spread my words. Keeping them interested in the disaster is critical now. That's the way I see it."

Disaster prevention: Can do better

March 8, 2015

News Navigator: How have disaster prevention measures changed after 2011 triple disasters?

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20150308p2a00m0na002000c.html>

The Mainichi Shimbun answers some common questions readers may have about the Basic Act on Disaster Control Measures, which went through revisions in 2012 and 2013 after the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Questions: What are some important points in the revisions to the disaster control law?

Answer: The March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami affected an extensive area, crippling administrative functions at the municipal level. As a result, municipal governments failed to provide sufficient support to local residents. **In the 2012 revisions, the national and prefectural governments were given authority to manage support and evacuation systems beyond the boundaries of municipalities.**

The 2013 revisions called on municipal governments to form lists of residents who would need special assistance in times of evacuation, such as the elderly and those with disabilities. In the 2011 disasters, information about such residents was not passed down to private support groups, which hindered the evacuation process in some places. **The law now allows local fire departments, social workers and private-sector organizations to acquire the lists of those who need special evacuation care without their consent.** However, municipal governments still need people's consent if they choose to provide the lists to relevant organizations before disasters actually take place.

Q: What about measures against possible nuclear plant disasters?

A: The government reviewed its guidelines for nuclear disaster measures in the wake of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant meltdown. Municipalities close to nuclear power plants are now working on evacuation measures based on the assumption that nuclear disasters can happen.

One of the major revisions to the law required municipal governments within 30 kilometers of nuclear plants to **map out nuclear disaster evacuation plans.** The distance was extended from 8 to 10 kilometers in the pre-revised law. Because of this, nursing homes and hospitals that are located within 30 kilometers from nuclear plants are now required to draw up evacuation plans.

Q: It sounds like our disaster preparedness has improved, doesn't it?

A: Well, yes and no. According to the national government, as of 2013, around 25 percent of all municipal governments had yet to complete compiling lists of residents needing special evacuation assistance in

case of a disaster. Some municipalities are still working on their lists. In addition, **the effectiveness of the nuclear disaster prevention measures are being questioned as nursing homes and hospitals are having difficulties mapping out evacuation plans.** (Answers by Tomoki Okuyama, City News Department)

Tokohu: Before and after

March 10, 2015

FOUR YEARS AFTER: Students' vision realized with smart glasses that show pre-quake Tohoku

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/quake_tsunami/AJ201503100092



Prototype smart glasses show how a Tohoku town appeared before the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. (Shinya Takagi)

By SHINYA TAKAGI/ Staff Writer

Sendai website development firm DMP and Sony Corp. have teamed to create a pair of smart glasses that will show how the Tohoku region appeared before the devastation caused by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

The concept for the wearable computer device was the brainchild of students at the Miyagi Prefectural Agricultural High School in Natori. After DMP learned of the students' idea, the company pitched it to Sony, which assisted in the development of the smart glasses.

When the device is worn at a location in Tohoku, the wearer will see an overlaid photo of the scene as it appeared before the disaster struck on March 11, 2011.

"It's easier to use this device than simply using photographs to help people imagine how things were before the disaster," said Kei Sato, a 32-year-old DMP project planner.

A prototype of the smart glasses will be unveiled during the U.N. World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction to be held in Sendai between March 14 and 18. The developers plan on having the final product ready within fiscal 2015. They also plan to include a simultaneous smartphone narration of what occurred in each locale during the disaster.

Currently, the prototype contains only images of Natori before the earthquake and tsunami. Guests at the conference will be invited to use the glasses to see how Natori formerly looked.

DMP plans to cooperate with municipalities and other establishments to add more images of the cities and towns in the region prior to the disaster

Inappropriate signboards

March 10, 2015(

Evacuated Fukushima town to remove ironic nuclear signboards

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150310p2g00m0dm035000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA, Japan (Kyodo) -- The town of Futaba, which has been evacuated since the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident, decided Monday to remove street signboards propagating the positive aspects of nuclear power.

The signboards in desolated streets carry slogans promoting atomic energy, including one reading, "Nuclear power: the energy for a bright future." Town officials said they will be removed because they have become decrepit.

The town authority on the same day submitted to the municipal assembly the fiscal 2015 draft budget earmarking some 4.1 million yen for the removal. If the budget is approved, the removal will begin from as early as in August, the officials said.

The signboards were set up in 1988 and 1991 in the town hosting the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

Many reconstruction plans must be reviewed

March 10, 2015

40% of municipalities in disaster-hit northeast say need to review reconstruction plans

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150310p2a00m0na014000c.html>

Nearly four years after the March 11, 2011 triple disasters, 18 out of 42 local government chiefs, or 40 percent of local government heads, in the hardest-hit prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima say their reconstruction plans need to be reviewed, according to a survey conducted by the Mainichi Shimbun. The Mainichi asked the chiefs of the municipalities in the three prefectures about the progress in their reconstruction plans. There has been little progress in work to rebuild or improve infrastructure in Fukushima Prefecture due to prolonged life as evacuees and a delay in decontamination work in the wake of the outbreak of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. At the same time, some reconstruction projects have been delayed in Iwate and Miyagi prefectures due to skyrocketing prices of materials, a lack of workers and other factors.

The central government is considering having local governments shoulder some of the reconstruction expenses after the end of the so-called "intensive reconstruction period" that runs through fiscal 2015. But local governments in the disaster-struck regions are asking the central government to extend the reconstruction period and continue to extend financial support to them.

The Mainichi conducted the questionnaire to chiefs of 12 municipalities in Iwate Prefecture, 15 municipalities in Miyagi Prefecture and 15 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture in February. Each municipal government set its reconstruction plan based on the Act on Special Zones for Reconstruction in Response to the Great East Japan Earthquake enacted in December 2011. Each municipal government set the reconstruction period at five to 10 years in line with reconstruction plans worked out by their relevant prefectural governments.

In the survey, the mayor of Okuma in Fukushima Prefecture replied, "A thorough review is needed." Okuma is one of the municipalities hosting the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, and its entire town remains evacuated. The municipal government has already been reviewing its reconstruction plan, saying, "We are reviewing it in light of changing situations such as the reorganization of evacuation zones and setting up of temporary storage facilities, among other factors."

In the survey, 17 municipal government chiefs -- three in Iwate Prefecture, four in Miyagi Prefecture and 10 in Fukushima Prefecture -- said their reconstruction plans need to be reviewed "to some extent." The Natori Municipal Government in Miyagi Prefecture, faced with a daunting task of collectively relocating residents of the Yuriage district hit hard by tsunami, is asking the central government to continue to extend financial assistance, saying, "The situation has changed from the time when we worked out our reconstruction plan, and it is difficult to secure financial resources to carry it out." The mayor of Rifu in Miyagi Prefecture said the government-financed reconstruction period must be extended because reconstruction work has been delayed due to a lack of local government staff and the failure to attract bidders for public works projects.

Five out of 15 municipal government chiefs in Fukushima Prefecture responded to the survey that their decontamination plans need to be reviewed "to some extent." Decontamination work has continued to be delayed in such municipalities as Iwaki and Namie because they are "struggling to secure temporary storage sites" for contaminated soil.

Population drain confirmed

March 09, 2015

Population drain continues in 20 disaster-hit municipalities: Mainichi survey

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150309p2a00m0na013000c.html>

Nearly 5,000 households in Miyagi, Iwate and Fukushima prefectures that lost their homes to the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami have resettled in municipalities outside their hometown, a Mainichi Shimbun survey has shown.

The survey found that at least 4,865 households in 20 municipalities in Miyagi, Iwate and Fukushima prefectures have relocated to other municipalities for resettlement -- accounting for 23 percent of households in the three prefectures that have already resettled in the wake of the quake disaster, and 10 percent of households that have lost their homes to the disaster.

The survey is based on figures tallied by the 20 municipal governments in Miyagi, Iwate and Fukushima prefectures. Among them, 15 municipalities that had also kept a tally last year have found a 2 percentage point hike in the ratio of disaster victims relocating to other municipalities this year, indicating a continued population outflow in disaster-hit areas.

The Mainichi conducted a questionnaire in January and February in municipalities in the three prefectures that were severely affected by the March 2011 tsunami, apart from municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture where blanket evacuation orders are in place. The survey asked the number of households that have applied for subsidies for resettling in municipalities outside their hometown.

Under the Act on Support for Reconstructing Livelihoods of Disaster Victims, residents who had their completely or partially destroyed homes demolished can apply for up to 1 million yen in basic grants with their home municipalities, and residents who purchase, repair or rent homes after evacuation can apply for up to 2 million yen in additional grants. The Mainichi asked the 20 municipal governments -- 11 in Iwate, seven in Miyagi and two in Fukushima -- for the number of households that applied for additional grants and how many of them have applied for resettling in other municipalities.

As a result, it emerged that a total of 47,849 households had applied for basic grants this year, with 20,927 of them having also applied for additional grants. Among the latter group, 4,865 households had relocated to municipalities outside their hometown. Cities including Sendai and Ishinomaki in Miyagi Prefecture -- which enjoy a stable population influx -- have not maintained such statistics.

The Miyagi Prefecture town of Onagawa had the highest percentage of households that chose to resettle elsewhere, at 73 percent, followed by the prefectural town of Minamisanriku at 49 percent. Both municipalities suffered extensive damage across the towns, and delays in housing land development and other measures are apparently behind the population drain.

In the 15 municipalities that had also kept a tally last year, the number of households that applied for additional subsidies increased by 20 percent to 14,963 this year, of which the ratio of households resettling in other municipalities rose from 22 percent to 24 percent this year -- or 2,690 households to 3,540 households, respectively.

Volunteers not covered

March 09, 2015

Radiation decontamination volunteers not supported by national gov't

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150309p2a00m0na016000c.html>

At least 30,000 volunteer workers have been involved in forays into areas in Fukushima Prefecture that fall under direct management of the national government due to high level of radiation, it has been learned from volunteer organizations.

These volunteer workers, who are not given any support by the national government for the management of their radiation levels, have engaged in decontamination work such as cutting grass over 2,500 times, efforts supposed be carried out by the government.

While the national government introduces volunteers to work in areas of relatively low radiation that are being decontaminated by municipal governments, it has little awareness of volunteer work in areas under its own direct jurisdiction.

Since April 2012, one volunteer group, "Minamisoma Volunteer Katsudo Center," has been operating mainly in Minamisoma's southern district of Odaka, which is an area under the national government's jurisdiction for radiation removal. The district was previously part of the 20-kilometer no-go zone set up around the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, but in April 2012 had its entry restrictions loosened. The group has recorded around 4,500 instances of its volunteer work, and around 32,000 people had been dispatched in the area by February 2014. Of these, the ones that constitute radioactive decontamination work include: cutting grass around 1,800 times, removing mud from ditches around 200 times, and cutting down trees around 500 times.

In decontamination work carried out by local and central governments, measurement and record-keeping of radiation levels are required by law, but for the work by the volunteer group, the center just measures the area beforehand, and if the radiation levels are high it makes the workers carry dosimeters.

In its guidelines for decontamination work, the Ministry of the Environment lists, in addition to grass-cutting, the cutting down or trimming of trees as effective ways to lower the radiation levels. In its instructions, however, the ministry advises that tree removal will generally not be done, and trimming will be limited to evergreens and only at up to four meters in height. The instructions say this trimming is done because rain and fallen leaves bring radiation from the branches to the ground, and the four-meter limit is for both reasons of safety and efficiency.

However, a 2013 test by the Fukushima Prefectural Government found that the removal of contaminated conifers cut radiation levels by 4 to 12 percent and removal of contaminated broad-leaf trees cut radiation levels by 11 to 21 percent. The center says that these results led to an increase in residents asking them to cut down trees around their houses.

According to the Environment Ministry, as of the end of January this year, 7 percent of homes in Odaka district and some neighboring areas had been decontaminated in work by the national government.

Volunteers are helping to shoulder the rest of the burden.

In October 2013, the volunteer group "Soso Volunteer" was founded. Currently, it has around 130 registered members. The group has handled around 50 volunteer jobs, including around 30 in restricted areas. Those jobs included cleaning houses, retrieving property and cutting grass. The group says that it has been contacted for help by residents when moving companies have refused to enter the restricted areas.

Another volunteer group, Skilled Veterans Corps for Fukushima, has conducted radiation monitoring in restricted areas including the town of Naraha with around 200 workers.

According to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, volunteers are not covered by the Industrial Safety and Health Act, and therefore are not subject to the radiation safety limit of 50 millisieverts for one year and 100 millisieverts for five years. They also cannot receive accident compensation under the

Industrial Accident Compensation Insurance Act. Furthermore, volunteer work insurance does not cover radiation exposure.

Regarding the volunteer work in Odaka, an official from the Environment Ministry's office for Fukushima Prefecture environmental rehabilitation commented, "We don't have detailed knowledge of it. The national government is proceeding with decontamination work in special areas marked for decontamination (such as Odaka district.)"

March 09, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Futaba rose garden



March 8, 2015

Labor of love left to wither and die in Fukushima

by Liane Wakabayashi

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2015/03/08/issues/labor-love-left-wither-die-fukushima/#.VPycM-F1Cov>

On March 11, 2011, Futaba, a sleepy Fukushima town and bedroom community for employees of the nearby No. 1 nuclear power plant, suddenly became a place known around the world — for all the wrong reasons.

Following the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, and the ensuing meltdowns, explosions and massive radiation leakage at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s No. 1 plant, approximately 57,000 Fukushima residents fled their homes in the prefecture, many abandoning communities they had been a part of for generations.

Katsuhide Okada, like most Futaba residents, never imagined that something so violent and wrenching could happen. Not a thought of such a catastrophe crossed his mind 50 years ago, when he began working toward his dream of cultivating a magnificent rose garden that would put Futaba on the map for tourism.

He didn't worry much about the power plant: It was so safe, Tepco told the Futaba community before No. 1 began operating in 1971, that even if a jumbo jet crashed into it, the plant could withstand the impact. "I was in such a peaceful job," recalls Okada, now 72. "In 1968 I opened the Futaba Rose Garden to the public. Two years later, the woman who would become my wife and business partner came to the garden and it was love at first sight."

Okada had grand ambitions of creating a garden worthy of the land his father had entrusted to him, with its magnificent mountain setting. From the beginning, he recognized the potential to attract tourists to an area of Fukushima little known about or visited.

"I never thought of myself as a spiritual person and yet I felt I could hear the roses' voices," says Okada. "Roses take an entire year to blossom. They look like plants, but as someone who takes care of roses, they are like children. And that's basically what I lost — my family."

Okada and his wife, Kazuko, who ran the restaurant and cafe at Futaba Rose Garden, have moved five times over the past four years, shifting between relatives and friends. Now they are living in temporary housing for evacuees in Tsukuba, Ibaraki Prefecture, where Okada's only rose bush is one he could salvage because it was in a planter.

The rest of the roses that Mr. Okada cultivated over a lifetime — more than 750 varieties, nearly 8,000 bushes — have perished. Still, Okada has returned to Futaba 10 times since his evacuation to photograph the eerie decay of his gardens — work he hopes will bolster his case for fair compensation from Tepco. Okada's two sons used to work alongside him at the Futaba Rose Garden. Now the older son works at a supermarket, the younger at an electrical firm, checking meters. While Okada has lost his dream, his sons have lost their future, and Okada holds Tepco responsible. These were the thoughts that kept Okada up at night in the months after the disaster.

"The biggest shock was for us all to go from a life where there was always something to do," Okada pauses. "I can't even express the magnitude of losing Futaba Rose Garden. I can't even express the loss."

Okada was staying with relatives in Kawaguchi, Saitama Prefecture, when Futaba town forwarded a letter to him in April 2011 from Hidemi Kinefuchi, a member of a group called the Yokohama Photographers of Roses. Kinefuchi had been one of the 50,000 visitors each year who arrived in busloads from all over Japan at the gates of Okada's 60,000-sq. meter (15-acre) garden. A week after the triple disaster, Kinefuchi wrote in her letter of her deep worry for the garden, which she had visited annually over the preceding decade. That someone he didn't even know shared his sentiments brought happiness to Okada for the first time since his ordeal had begun.

"From 5 a.m. until sunset, the garden was open," Kinefuchi recalls. "The climate was perfect for growing roses, the soil was good, the air was clean, the difference between daytime and nighttime temperatures was wide, which would bring out a dazzling clarity of color, especially in early morning."

"When Mr. Okada made the 'Path of Wild Roses,' I found myself always going there. Since it was a bit off the beaten track, I often found myself alone. One day, Mr. Okada noticed me and we got chatting about our shared favorites flourishing here — single-petaled wild roses and the crinkly old roses. He told me that since they were not available in Japan, he had imported them from Britain."

A long-anticipated visit by the World Federation of Rose Societies in May 2011 was to be the garden's crowning moment, heralding its induction into an exclusive league of the world's finest rose gardens. For Okada, it was to bring international recognition for a lifetime's hard work.

Instead, a year after the abandonment of his garden, he was interviewed on NHK appearing grim and heartbroken as he described the death and decay of everything he had cultivated. Then he paused, to talk about how friendships forged with members of the Yokohama Society of Rose Photographers had lifted him out of the darkness.

“Hidemi Kinefuchi, one of the rose photographers, wrote me a letter a week after the disaster. I remembered her from our conversations on the Path of Wild Roses,” Okada said. “I was overwhelmed with gratitude.”

Soon after Kinefuchi’s first letter, her photography teacher, Hisako Matsuda, wrote to Okada as well, and persuaded him to include his Futaba Rose Garden photographs from before and after 3/11 in her group’s exhibitions, a project that continues to this day to build awareness all over Japan of the delights of the former Futaba Rose Garden.

“Mr. Okada didn’t copy French or English gardens. His garden was uniquely his own,” says Kinefuchi. “He thought how the Himalayan cedar trees he planted would tower years from now — he was always forward-thinking. Every year there were new surprises in the garden to look forward to.”

Maya Moore, a former news anchor and journalist at NHK, happened to catch Okada’s interview on TV and was moved to track him down. When she heard his story and about how the Yokohama Photographers of Roses had preserved thousands of his roses — if only in photo form — she collaborated with Okada and the group in putting together the book “The Rose Garden of Fukushima.”

“Mr. Okada touched me with his courage and resilience,” she says. “It’s unimaginable to go this far in life, be a master at what he does, and then lose everything in an instant. He tries to keep his humor, and doggedly pursues a future he’s not certain about. He’s a real inspiration.”

Now in his 70s, Okada is determined to start a new garden and work side by side with his two sons again. Before that, though, he must resolve the issue of compensation with Tepco, which may mean going through the courts if the company fails to pay adequately or promptly.

“One of the reasons I feel confident asking for compensation is that I feel there was nothing at fault from my side,” says Okada. “I did all I could do to build a garden that was making Futaba famous.”

Fans of Fukushima Rose Garden: www.facebook.com/pages/Fans-of-Fukushima-Rose-Garden/793596480716283. Photos from the garden are on show at the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of Japan, Yurakucho, Tokyo, until April 3. The Foreign Element usually appears on Tuesday, but there is no Community Page in tomorrow’s JT.

Tainted legacy: Ewan, the son of author Marie Mutsuki Mockett, stands outside Empukuji Temple in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture. | MARIE MUTSUKI MOCKETT

Meanwhile, others feel duty-bound to stay

In an op-ed for The New York Times on March 14, 2011, Marie Mutsuki Mockett expressed fears for her relatives in Fukushima Prefecture and the threat to their way of life. Her family included a Zen Buddhist priest whose temple, Empukuji, in the city of Iwaki, was only 30 km from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, which was spewing high levels of radioactive material over the region in the wake of the tsunami and subsequent reactor meltdowns of March 11.

Having spent many a summer in Iwaki since childhood, soaking up her mother’s language and the peaceful coastal way of life, Mockett had witnessed many Zen rituals at Empukuji. She was spurred to write the book “Where the Dead Pause, and the Japanese Say Goodbye: A Journey” as an attempt to come to terms with her family’s brave decision to remain in Iwaki even when radiation levels were worryingly high. The memoir is based on the year that Mockett spent in post-3/11 Tohoku exploring the subjects of grief, loss and mourning.

"I thought I could help Japan tell her story, reveal herself in a three-dimensional way, as a person who spends a lot of time in Japan," says Mockett, who was born and raised in the U.S. by American and Japanese parents. Her mother's family are no strangers to tragedy: She recalls stories of her great-aunt and -uncle leaving Nagasaki only a few days before the atomic bomb was dropped on the city in August 1945.

Like many concerned friends and family watching the nuclear accident unfold on their TV sets outside of Japan, she begged her relatives to evacuate for their own safety. But for her Zen Buddhist family, dedicated to serving their community in the best and worst of times, evacuation was unthinkable. And four years later, the Buddhist priests of Tohoku find themselves in higher demand than ever.

"They have instated a new head priest — my oldest cousin, Hiro, who will take over Empukuji," explains Mockett. "This makes it clear to the *danka*, our spiritual community, that someone will continue to care for the ancestors. Our family is committed.

"Iwaki is full of temporary housing now," she continues. "The number of nuclear evacuees has expanded. A recent housing development has increased the *danka*.

"Evacuees, the new residents of Iwaki, are able to use Empukuji when they cannot access their own temple in the exclusion zone," she says, referring to the area within a 20-km radius of the No. 1 plant. "On the other hand, their presence has caused much social stress. It's hard for locals to talk about. My family tries hard simply to listen to complaints."

As time passes, Mockett has come to realize that her family in Fukushima was really very lucky.

"Iwaki is just outside the exclusion zone. The radiation is slightly higher than what you have in Tokyo but not considered to be dangerous. They were able to do their best, serve their community and enter a new chapter in the phase of our family life and temple."

Mockett will read from "Where the Dead Pause" on the 6th floor of Books Kinokuniya Tokyo in Sendagaya, Shibuya Ward, on March 14, 2 p.m. (www.facebook.com/events/878520565519516) Kris Kosaka's book review:

bit.ly/mockettreview Your comments: community@japantimes.co.jp

Impact of 3/11 on Tohoku region (1)

March 9, 2015

Some Tohoku disaster areas on fast track to rebuilding while others stuck in slow lane

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/09/national/tohoku-disaster-areas-fast-track-rebuilding-others-stuck-slow-lane/#.VP1pvOF1Cos>

URL video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=-r56DOAsb-U

by Shusuke Murai
Staff Writer

This is the first of a five-part series on the lingering impact of the March 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster on the three hardest-hit prefectures in the Tohoku region.

“Bridge of Hope” is the name of a temporary span over the Kesen River in Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture.

It connects a hill where construction is underway to create a residential area on high ground and to raise a low-lying coastal zone where 4,045 dwellings were destroyed by gigantic tsunami on March 11, 2011.

The bridge is not for people. Built in front of the city’s symbolic “miracle pine tree” that survived the tsunami when the rest of its grove was swept away, the temporary bridge is a link in a 3-km-long conveyor belt system that carries 40,000 tons of soil and gravel — the equivalent of 4,000 10-ton truckloads — from the hill every day.

Four years ago, 18-meter-high tsunami hit the coastal city and killed 1,556 residents; 207 are still listed as missing.

The waves also devastated the city’s famous oyster farms and a pine forest the government had designated as one of 100 locations nationwide of special scenic beauty.

Rikuzentakata is one part of the Tohoku region aiming to fast-track its rebirth and become a safer place to live.

To that end, the city is building two seawalls 1.8 km long, one 3 meters high and the other 12.5 meters, as part of efforts to mitigate the threat of future tsunami. It is also elevating the land in the coastal zone by some 10 meters.

Thanks to the conveyor belt system built in March 2014 by general contractor Shimizu Corp. at a cost of ¥12 billion, the city can shorten the time it will take for the reconstruction work from an initially planned nine years to two.

Besides being efficient, the conveyor system offers hope to the tsunami survivors waiting to get back to a semblance of normalcy, Rikuzentakata Mayor Futoshi Toba said.

“Thanks to the eye-catching machine that symbolizes the reconstruction by operating every day, survivors can experience step-by-step progress,” he said, adding that the conveyor system, which has rarely been used for ordinary construction work, has also drawn sightseers.

Seeing the progress with their own eyes is “much more encouraging for people” than what officials can do behind closed doors, the mayor said.

Rikuzentakata’s progress represents Tohoku’s hopes — and struggles — to reconstruct life as usual.

With most of the tsunami debris disposed of by last March, except for in some no-go-zone and evacuation areas in Fukushima Prefecture where radioactive decontamination work is still underway, Tohoku has finally started full-scale building of permanent dwellings, both detached houses and condominiums, for survivors who lost their homes in the disaster.

Many survivors, however, are still in limbo as municipalities face delays in providing permanent housing units.

Iwate Prefecture had constructed 1,049 publicly funded replacement homes for survivors as of January — just 18 percent of the 5,933 units planned to be built by September 2018. The deadline was initially March 2018.

Miyagi is also experiencing construction delays.

As of January, the prefecture had built 2,692 housing units, or 17.4 percent of 15,484 units planned to be completed by March 2018.

In Fukushima, only 261 units, or 5 percent of the 4,890 units planned by March 2018, were available for nuclear disaster evacuees as of January. Also, just 1,190 replacement houses, or 44 percent of the 2,702 units planned, were constructed for tsunami and earthquake survivors in the prefecture.

The delay is due to the rising cost of labor and construction materials, Iwate Gov. Takuya Tasso said. Meanwhile a vast number of people continue to live in temporary housing units.

In Iwate, 22,300 people were still in prefab temporary housing as of January, down a mere 13 percent from 25,619 last March.

Miyagi in January still had 35,332 people living in temporary shelters, down 16 percent from the 42,310 listed 10 months earlier.

The situation in Fukushima also remains problematic, with 24,098 people still living in temporary housing in January, even though 15 percent of 28,367 had moved away from such units as of last March.

The number of temporary shelter dwellers is surprisingly high, considering that all displaced survivors of the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake had moved out of similar housing five years after that disaster. The Hanshin temblor caused greater structural damage than the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, but there were no huge tsunami.

Industries in the Tohoku region are also suffering from slumping sales and manpower shortages.

Seafood production in Tohoku remains low. According to a survey by the Fisheries Agency between November and January, just 53 percent of facilities in Iwate Prefecture were operating at 80 percent or above of their pre-disaster levels. In Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures, the number is even lower, at 50 percent and 25 percent, respectively.

Worse, the percentage of facilities at or above the 80-percent production threshold hasn't changed much since last year's survey, which recorded 57 percent in Iwate, 49 percent in Miyagi and 24 percent in Fukushima.

A recovery in seafood sales has also foundered, with this year's survey showing just 58 percent of firms in Iwate reaching 80 percent or above pre-disaster levels. The figure is 40 percent in Miyagi and a mere 21 percent in Fukushima.

Iwate Gov. Tasso said the slumping sales in Tohoku fisheries is due to delays in the recovery of factories to process fish products, and radiation fears stemming from the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Despite abundant job opportunities, the three hardest-hit prefectures are suffering a labor crunch.

Local industries, especially fish processing, construction and nursing care, are suffering from the shortage of human resources. Specialists who can take the lead in constructing infrastructure for community development are also in short supply, Tasso said.

Some Rikuzentakata residents don't hide their anxiety about life after reconstruction.

Taxi driver Haruyuki Sato doubts people want to return to live in areas where they lost their homes to the tsunami.

"I can't foresee how the city will turn out (after all the reconstruction ends)," he said.

Some citizens oppose the city's planned seawalls, which will mar the traditional coastal scenery and the planned 70,000-tree pine forest to be planted on land between the embankments.

Midori Murakami of sightseeing promoter Marugoto-Rikuzentakata said that as the construction progresses, there is an emotional gap between locals who lost loved ones in the disaster and those who didn't.

"Some people complain about creating a (raised-ground zone) on land where about 200 missing people may be buried," she said. "But otherwise we can't move ahead. . . . I feel both excitement and concern while the reconstruction advances.

"But local people are looking forward. . . . Thanks to the reconstruction, I get to know many new people and we work together," she added.

Fiscal 2015, which starts next month, will mark the fifth year of Iwate's eight-year reconstruction plan and the second year of its three-year "full-fledged" effort to rebuild housing, lives and industries for survivors.

The estimated reconstruction budget will reach ¥1.1 trillion, the highest since the disasters if not counting past debris disposal, the governor said.

“When thinking about disaster victims . . . I feel it’s a mission for us survivors to reconstruct a city filled with smiles . . . (so) that even the most depressed people come here and become encouraged by finding diverse people at work and full of pride,” said Rikuzentakata Mayor Toba, who lost his wife in the disaster. Fiscal 2015 will also be the final year of the government’s ¥25 trillion five-year reconstruction budget, which Toba said is the biggest concern for those hoping the rebuilding work won’t grind to a halt. The administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has not made an official plan on whether or how to distribute the reconstruction budget after March 2016.

Toba is worried that the apparent waning sense of crisis among the public may lead to policymakers placing less priority on reconstruction.

“If possible, I want as many people as possible to visit the reconstruction sites — not necessarily Rikuzentakata — while the damage from the great earthquake still remains. Then, I want them to revisit after five, 10 years (to see the dramatic changes after the reconstruction),” he said.

“All bereaved families have something unforgettable inside them . . . but I think even that sorrow may turn to become an unbeatable energy (to generate positive effects).

In memoriam

March 11, 2015

FOUR YEARS AFTER: Japan prays for Tohoku disaster victims

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201503110018>



Shinji Seo, center, visits the memorial for his daughter, Kanae, along with his wife and son in Ofunato, Iwate Prefecture, on March 11. (Yasuhiro Sugimoto)

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Members of the Seo family on March 11 made the familiar trek along the coast of Ofunato, Iwate Prefecture, to a plot where a stone monument, figurines, flowers and even a white Christmas tree stand. Sobbing, Shinji Seo, 60, his wife, Hiromi, 56, and their son, Ryosuke, 27, prayed for the memory of daughter Kanae, who disappeared four years ago from this spot in the Okirai district after risking her life to save an elderly woman.

The Seo family's small ceremony was one of countless held around the nation on the fourth anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami that devastated the northeastern Tohoku region.

From schoolchildren to the emperor, people in Japan prayed for the souls of the 15,891 people killed and the 2,584 missing in the March 11, 2011, catastrophe.

Prayers also went out to the 229,000 people who are still living as evacuees, including many who were driven from their homes after the tsunami caused the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The central government has designated the five years after Japan's worst postwar natural disaster as the "period for intensive recovery." But numbers show that a huge amount of work is still needed in this immense project.

After the magnitude-9.0 earthquake rattled the Tohoku region, horrific images spread of the tsunami destroying villages and carrying houses, cars and even ships far inland. The nation was in shock, and untold misery spread across the Tohoku region.

At a government-sponsored ceremony at the National Theater in Tokyo's Chiyoda Ward on March 11, Sayaka Sugawara, 19, explained how she was swallowed up in the cold, dark water that engulfed her home in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture

Sugawara said she tried to free her mother who had become trapped under debris, but it was too heavy to move. The last words she heard from her mother were, "Don't go."

"I told her, 'Thank you, I love you' before I swam to a nearby elementary school," she said.

The ceremony was attended by Emperor Akihito, Empress Michiko, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and bereaved family members.

They offered a silent prayer at 2:46 p.m., the time the earthquake struck.

Sugawara has since spoken and written about her experiences as part of a group that wants to pass on lessons of the disaster to others.

Emperor Akihito urged people to do the same and to never forget those who are still suffering from the disaster.

"The situation surrounding the affected people is still severe, and I think it is important for the entire nation to unite from now on, too," the emperor said. "It is important to hand down lessons from the disaster to future generations and to continue making efforts to build a safer country."

On the day the Great East Japan Earthquake struck, Kanae Seo was a 20-year-old student at Kitasato University's School of Marine Biosciences whose campus is located in Ofunato.

She was swallowed by the waves after she helped an elderly woman in a wheelchair escape the disaster.

Almost every month, Shinji and Hiromi, who live in Tokyo's Nerima Ward, have visited the site where Kanae disappeared. They never found her.

In March 2014, they set up a stone memorial about 1.5 meters wide and 60 cm high about 200 meters from where Kanae's apartment building once stood. The couple had become acquainted with a local resident who offered land for the memorial.

However, they will have to transfer the memorial by the end of this month to make room for work to elevate a prefectural road.

"I want to put it in a quiet place that commands a view of the sea," Shinji said.

Work on roads in the Tohoku region has made steady progress since the disaster. About 99 percent of national roads directly managed by the central government have been rebuilt.

But work in other critical areas has been slow.

Only 4,543, or 15 percent, of the 29,517 planned public houses that will become permanent homes for disaster victims have been completed in the three hardest-hit prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima. The delays have been caused mainly by the sharp rises in prices for construction materials and workers' wages.

The number of households living in temporary housing facilities in the three prefectures fell by 13,000 in the year to Jan. 1, but it was still 77,000.

Reconstruction Agency data underscore the problems and hardships facing those forced to live away from their homes after the disaster struck. The agency said 3,194 of them killed themselves or died because of deteriorated physical conditions as of the end of September 2014.

Infrastructure is not the only thing that needs rebuilding in the Tohoku region.

In Fukushima Prefecture, home of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant that was swamped by the tsunami, evacuation orders were lifted in the nearby municipalities of Tamura and Kawauchi in 2014.

But fears of radiation contamination and distrust of plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. and government authorities continue around the crippled plant. Only 40 percent of the evacuees from Tamura and 10 percent of those from Kawauchi have returned home.

The accumulation of contaminated water at the plant has been a constant problem in efforts to finally decommission the reactors. The volume of highly radioactive water peaked at 367,000 tons in September 2014, and has since been declining.

However, radioactive water leaks and malfunctioning equipment continue to be reported, sometimes belatedly.

The processing of highly contaminated water stored in tanks at the plant is scheduled to be completed in May. But the method will not eliminate radioactive tritium, and how to dispose of the water has yet to be decided.

Around the nuclear plant, soil, debris and other materials contaminated with radioactive substances remain at temporary storage sites in Fukushima Prefecture and several other prefectures.

The recovery rate of farmlands and the total fish haul at major fishing ports in the affected areas are both around 70 percent of pre-disaster levels.

According to a survey conducted by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry in autumn 2014, sales at 80 percent of companies in Tohoku's main industries, such as fisheries and food processing, remain below pre-disaster levels.

As of the end of January 2015, the total population in 39 of 42 municipalities hard hit by the disaster decreased by about 92,000, or 6.7 percent, in the nearly four-year period, according to an Asahi Shimbun survey.

The three municipalities where the population increased were Sendai and the neighboring municipalities of Natori and Rifu. Local officials said the rise was due mainly to an influx of evacuees from other areas and workers seeking jobs in the reconstruction effort.

A panoramic view of Ukedo Elementary School in Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, that remains deserted and unrepaired four years after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami:

<http://www.asahi.com/panorama/150220ukedoprimaryschool/>

Japan marks 4 years since quake, tsunami, nuclear disasters

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150311p2g00m0dm001000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Japan marked the fourth anniversary Wednesday of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami that devastated the country's northeastern region, left more than 18,000 people dead or missing and triggered the continuing Fukushima nuclear crisis.

The anniversary comes as reconstruction in the hard-hit prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima has not progressed as planned, with many evacuees still forced to live away from their hometowns amid the ongoing decommissioning work at the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant and decontamination work in Fukushima.

"I would like to pray for the peaceful repose of the victims and express my sincere sympathy to their families and those who are still living as evacuees," said Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga at a press conference in the morning.

A government-sponsored memorial service will be held in Tokyo, attended by Emperor Akihito, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and representatives of people who lost family members, with a moment of silence to be observed at 2:46 p.m., when the magnitude-9.0 quake occurred four years ago.

In severe cold weather just like four years ago, local people prayed for the victims early on Wednesday.

In Wakabayashi Ward in Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture, residents prayed in front of a monument bearing 192 victims' names.

The disaster "seems like a long time ago but it was also like only yesterday," said Makiko Ito, a 39-year-old company employee mourning the loss of a colleague.

While police in the three hard-hit prefectures conducted search operations for the bodies of people still unaccounted for at a coastal area along the Pacific Ocean, evacuation drills were held across the region.

"It is hard recalling the bitter memories of the disaster. But I think today's drill is important," said Sachiko Kitamura, 79, who joined one in Miyako, Iwate Prefecture.

The temblor was one of the most powerful quakes on record in Japan, and the ensuing tsunami left 15,891 people dead and 2,584 unaccounted for, most in the three prefectures in the Tohoku region, according to the latest tally released by the National Police Agency on Tuesday.

Among the 228,863 people evacuated due to the multiple disasters, 47,219 Fukushima residents remained outside the prefecture as of Feb. 12 after being hit by the world's worst nuclear accident since the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear crisis.

None of the nation's 48 commercial nuclear reactors is active at the moment. Despite persistent safety concerns among the public, the Abe government is pushing toward bringing some of the reactors back online.

Four reactors -- two at a plant in southwestern Japan and two at a plant in western Japan -- have obtained safety clearance to restart under tighter regulations introduced after the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

The government has allocated a total of 26.30 trillion yen (\$217 billion) for reconstruction work over the five-year period through March 2016, mainly for infrastructural improvement, including relocating communities to higher ground and building coastal levees.

But the reconstruction of residential areas remains slow due to a shortage of construction workers and higher construction material prices.

The number of people living in prefabricated makeshift housing complexes in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures at the end of February totaled 80,372.

The disasters have also taken a heavy toll on survivors, leaving some vulnerable to ill-health as they continue to live in temporary housing. Since the disasters, 3,244 of them have died due to infirmity, suicide and other causes.

March 11, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Bereaved family plants cherry trees at elementary school to honor 6-year-old girl

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150311p2a00m0na005000c.html>

ISHINOMAKI, Miyagi -- Ten cherry trees were planted at an elementary school here as a present from the bereaved family of a girl who would've become a student there in April 2011 had she not been lost to the tsunami that struck the previous month.

Rio Fuse was trying to evacuate from her home near Ishinomaki Municipal Watanoha Elementary School with her grandmother when she was swallowed by tsunami waves on March 11, 2011. Ten days later, the six-year-old girl's body was found near the school fence.

The image of Rio carrying a light blue satchel that her grandparents had bought for her in preparation for elementary school is etched into the mind of Rio's 33-year-old father, Hidehiko.

"If she were still alive, she would've been able to meet so many people," he lamented.

A year after the triple disasters of 2011, when life began to regain some semblance of normality, Hidehiko started to consider seeking permission to plant cherry trees on the school grounds in his daughter's honor. He finally asked the school in January this year, saying he wanted to present the trees as proof that his daughter had lived. The school readily accepted the gift and the sentiment behind it.

Watanoha Elementary School had 456 students at the time of the disasters, seven of whom died that day four years ago. The student body is about half of what it was then as many families were evacuated, and the children who remained had to take classes in prefab facilities.

"The students have done their best while having a whole range of feelings and thoughts," the school's principal, Tatsuo Matsuura, said. "Hopefully the cherry trees will nudge us further toward recovery."

The trees stand four meters tall and were planted around a small artificial hill in the school playground.

Hidehiko held a photo of Rio as his daughters Kokoro, 12, and Kanon, 3 -- the latter born five months after the disasters and set to enter the school three years from now -- shoveled soil onto the tree roots.

A base for a sign that reads "Cherry Blossom Row, Rio" was created by Shinichi Endo, 46, a woodworker in the Miyagi Prefecture city of Higashimatsushima who lost three children in the quake disaster and met with Prince William on his recent visit from Britain.

The trees have buds on them, which are expected to blossom next month. "Watch over the children (at the school), will you?" Hidehiko asked his late daughter as he looked forward to the day the trees are covered in blossoms.

New plan for Fukushima by summer

March 11, 2015

FOUR YEARS AFTER: Abe pledges new reconstruction framework by summer

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201503110031>

By EITARO TAKEYAMA/ Staff Writer

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe pledged sharply increased support to revitalize business operations in Fukushima Prefecture, through measures to be decided in May.

That would be a key pillar of a reconstruction framework for a five-year period from fiscal 2016 that his administration will compile by this summer.

Without going into specifics, Abe unveiled the program during a news conference held on the eve of the fourth anniversary of the earthquake and tsunami disaster that triggered the nuclear crisis.

The central government had designated the five-year period until fiscal 2015 as one "for intensive restoration work."

Prior to the March 10 news conference, Abe attended a joint meeting of the reconstruction promotion council and the nuclear energy disaster countermeasures headquarters and instructed them to concentrate on three main points.

The areas highlighted by Abe were that a latter five-year period framework would be compiled from fiscal 2016; the framework would seek to guide the disaster-stricken areas to greater independence; and to continue with support measures of vital importance.

At the same time, Abe told the participants that fiscal constraints did not allow for unlimited spending. Reconstruction Minister Wataru Takeshita has already said that rather than continue with the policy of having the central government shoulder the entire burden, local governments would also be asked to bear some of the financial costs. His remarks were in reference to the reconstruction budget after fiscal 2016. At his news conference, Abe stopped short of endorsing that stance and only said: "We will study a range of issues, while listening to the voices of disaster victims. This will include the extent to which local governments will be required to shoulder the fiscal burden."

Abe also pledged to resume operations over the entire JR Joban Line, which runs within 3 kilometers of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. Operations on part of the line that begins in Tokyo and follows the Pacific coastline of Ibaraki, Fukushima and Miyagi prefectures have been suspended since the nuclear accident.

Abe also touched upon the continuing problem of water contaminated with radioactive materials flowing out of the Fukushima No. 1 plant. He said his government would play a leading role in dealing with that issue rather than leave everything up to Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the wrecked Fukushima plant.

Gov't to craft fresh plan for Fukushima by summer: Abe

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150311p2g00m0dm037000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said Tuesday that the government will outline a fresh plan by the summer for the future of Fukushima Prefecture, home to the power plant that in 2011 sparked the world's worst nuclear crisis since the 1986 Chernobyl disaster.

Speaking on the eve of the fourth anniversary of the March 11, 2011, earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster, Abe said the government will also craft a new five-year plan by the summer to promote the recovery of Fukushima and other disaster-hit areas in northeastern Japan.

As part of a future vision of Fukushima, Abe referred to the idea that the government will help it build a center of advanced research in such new areas as robotics and renewable energy.

In an effort to better assist people in affected areas, Abe said, "With a five-year intensive reconstruction period (for Fukushima and other affected areas) ending in March next year, (the government) will draw up a framework by the summer of new assistance for reconstruction in the next five years."

Abe said the government will do its best to get parliament to approve a state budget for fiscal 2015, which will start on April 1, for reconstruction projects, and that it will implement necessary projects in fiscal 2016 and beyond.

"Reconstruction is still halfway through," he said, adding that the government is "putting an emphasis on acceleration of reconstruction."

Asked about the recent revelation of another leak of radioactive water into the ocean from the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, Abe said, "It is very regrettable that Tokyo Electric Power Co. (operator of the plant) failed to sufficiently disclose information," and that the government has instructed the utility to take additional measures to curb the leak of radioactive materials.

Despite such negative news, Abe said he wants the world to see progress of the recovery through occasions such as a Group of Seven summit in Japan in 2016 and the 2019 Rugby World Cup tournament, part of which will take place in Kamaishi in Iwate Prefecture, northeastern Japan.

The prime minister said Japan will increase efforts so it can achieve the full reconstruction of Fukushima and other disaster-hit areas in time for the 2020 Olympics and Paralympics Games in Tokyo. The government will choose the venue of next year's G-7 summit ahead of this year's summit in June in Germany. The G-7 groups Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States.

Reconstruction plan: Tug-of-war between Gov't and local governments

March 11, 2015

Four years on, disaster-hit areas troubled by gov't reconstruction policy

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150311p2a00m0na006000c.html>

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe instructed relevant government ministries and agencies on March 10 to work out a framework for reconstruction assistance for the five-year period between fiscal 2016 and 2020 by the summer of this year.

Some government officials, agonizing over difficulties in securing financial resources to rebuild the country's northeast, which was hit hard by the March 11, 2011 triple disasters, are calling for the disaster-struck municipalities to become "self-sufficient." Therefore, the government, which has been shouldering all reconstruction expenses, is to look into the option of asking the disaster-hit municipalities to foot the bill for some reconstruction projects. But the local governments in the disaster-hit regions are wary about the possibility of important projects being terminated. Such being the case, talks between the central government and the municipal governments on reconstruction policy after the so-called "intensive reconstruction period" ends in March 2016 are bound to run into difficulties.

Prime Minister Abe said at a news conference on March 10, "We will consider (a new reconstruction policy) including the idea of whether local governments should shoulder some expenses while listening to the needs of disaster-stricken regions. We will help the disaster-stricken regions become self-sufficient and extend as much support as possible to them." In other words, Abe left the possibility open that disaster-hit municipalities will have to pay for some of the reconstruction projects in fiscal 2016 and thereafter. Of the 10-year reconstruction period after the March 11, 2011 triple disasters, the "intensive reconstruction period" ends with fiscal 2015. Therefore, the government needs to show a new five-year framework for a reconstruction policy by August when government ministries and agencies make budgetary requests for fiscal 2016. Reconstruction Minister Wataru Takeshita said at a news conference on March 10, "We will work it out as early as June."

In an interview with news organizations in early March, Takeshita revealed a possible plan to have disaster-struck municipalities cover some of the reconstruction costs in fiscal 2016 and thereafter. He said on March 6, "The purpose of reconstruction is to ensure that each resident stands on their own. Paying for everything out of national coffers could cause a moral hazard."

Some officials within the government and ruling parties have long pointed out that there is a limit to how much of the reconstruction can be funded by the central government. The reconstruction budget for the period through fiscal 2015 totals 26.3 trillion yen, exceeding the 25 trillion yen predicted by the government. Therefore, the government will likely have difficulties in securing financial resources for all reconstruction projects for fiscal 2016 and thereafter. Prime Minister Abe complained to Takeshita,

saying, "It is indeed difficult to secure financial resources, isn't it?" Takeshita responded, "We will do our utmost in negotiations with the Finance Ministry."

Many government and ruling party officials still remember the so-called 2013 "guidelines for accelerating reconstruction of Fukushima" in which the government effectively abandoned efforts to help return all Fukushima residents to their homes and instead included programs to help them settle elsewhere.

Tadamori Oshima, head of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's task force on accelerating post-disaster reconstruction, played a central role in working out a ruling party proposal for the guidelines and the government accepted it without any changes. In other words, the ruling parties took the blame for the failure on behalf of the government. The ruling parties are poised to compile their fifth proposal as early as May and provide indirect support for the government.

However, municipalities, particularly small local governments in the hardest-hit prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima, which want the government to continue funding and improving reconstruction projects, are expected to object to recommendations that they take on some of the costs. For this reason, Takeshita is quoted as telling people close to him, "I will become the bad guy. I will pick up the pieces that Oshima didn't get." At the same time, Takeshita expressed his worries, saying, "I can't make the prime minister the bad guy." Some ruling party officials are worried that the issue could affect the unified local elections in April.

The Reconstruction Agency has started to examine past reconstruction projects and is categorizing projects as those that should be financed by the government in the future and those that should not. The agency is likely to assign central government funding to key projects to help affected communities relocate to higher ground and build reconstruction housing and levees; projects to bring an end to the Fukushima nuclear crisis; and measures to deal with damages caused by harmful rumors about radiation contamination. But there is a deep-rooted view that excessive government spending for other reconstruction projects could "immerse (disaster-stricken regions) in subsidies." The government wants to streamline reconstruction projects by employing a "selection and concentration" strategy of cutting back on projects and having municipal governments cover some reconstruction expenses. But the tug of war between the central government and the three prefectural governments, which want the national government to set aside about 8.1 trillion yen for projects to be carried out after fiscal 2016, is likely to intensify further.

March 11, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Slow recovery

March 11, 2015

Slow recovery from nuclear disaster

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2015/03/11/editorials/slow-recovery-nuclear-disaster/#.VQHxgOF1Cos>

Reconstruction continues to be hampered in areas of Fukushima Prefecture affected by the March 2011 triple meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant four years ago. Nearly 120,000 residents of Fukushima remain displaced within and outside the prefecture — compared with 135,000 a year ago. In some of the municipalities around the plant once rendered off-limits by the radiation fallout, the return of local residents reportedly has proceeded slowly even after evacuation advisories were lifted over the past year.

Tepco continues to struggle in its attempt to clean up the mess at the No. 1 plant. Managing the massive flow of radiation-contaminated underground water remains a huge challenge, and the work to decommission the crippled plant — estimated to take decades to complete — is still in its initial stage. Huge volumes of radioactive soil and other waste collected during the decontamination of areas hit by the fallout are still kept in flexible containers and piled up in hundreds of temporary repositories or even in housing premises across the prefecture, waiting to be shipped to a giant storage facility to be built around the No. 1 plant.

Having reversed the previous Democratic Party of Japan-led government's policy of phasing out nuclear power in the wake of the Fukushima crisis, the Abe administration is now pushing to reactivate nuclear reactors idled since the 2011 disaster once they have cleared the safety screening of the Nuclear Regulation Authority. While Prime Minister Shinzo Abe repeatedly pledges to reduce the nation's energy dependency on nuclear power as much as possible through energy-saving efforts and the introduction of more renewable energy, his administration contemplates measures to help maintain nuclear power even in the upcoming wave of power retail deregulation.

The administration needs to look at what's happening in Fukushima and weigh the real cost of nuclear power —not only the economic cost but also the impact on people's lives in the event of severe accidents. In April last year, a district in Tamura, Fukushima Prefecture, became the first area inside of the former exclusion zone within 20 km of the Tepco plant to see evacuation advisories for residents lifted since the 2011 disaster. Such advisories were also lifted for parts of Kawauchi and Minamisoma in October and December, respectively. While those steps removed administrative hurdles for townspeople to once again take up residence in their communities, the return of former residents is said to be proceeding slowly. The town of Naraha — much of which also lies within the 20 km zone — is seeking to enable the return of its roughly 7,400 residents sometime after this spring. Last month, the municipal office moved some of its functions — temporarily transferred to the city of Iwaki when local residents were forced to evacuate after the 2011 disaster — back to the town. The government's decontamination of houses and roads were finished a year ago and electricity and water supplies are nearly restored. In a survey carried out by the town and the Reconstruction Agency last fall, about 45 percent of the residents indicated that they want to return. But many of the younger people said they have no plan to go back, some of them citing radiation fears.

The same survey showed that a growing proportion of the evacuated former residents in the towns of Futaba and Okuma — the host municipalities of the Tepco plant — have given up returning to their hometowns and decided to resettle elsewhere. Much of Futaba and Okuma are designated as areas where residency will remain difficult for many years due to high levels of radiation. Last month the two towns gave the go-ahead for a trial shipment of decontamination waste — a fraction of the estimated total 22 million cubic meters in volume — into a planned facility where it would be stored for 30 years. But it remains uncertain when the facility will be completed and ready to begin full operations as negotiations between the government and roughly 2,400 local landowners for the purchase of their land are proceeding slowly.

Four years on, there's still a long road ahead before life in the affected areas of Fukushima Prefecture can return to normalcy.

Grief and anger

March 12, 2015

FOUR YEARS AFTER: Nuclear power plant worker regrets not saving wife in tsunami

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201503120010

By TAKURO NEGISHI/ Staff Writer

IWAKI, Fukushima Prefecture--On the morning of the fourth anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake, Masashi Yoshida offered water and freshly cooked rice to his late wife's altar in his apartment here.

He spoke to Kimie, who is in a wedding dress in a portrait. "I am leaving," he said. "Please watch over me." He then headed for a memorial service sponsored by the government.

Yoshida, 51, is one of 7,000 people working at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, where he was at on the day the quake and tsunami triggered the nuclear accident. Kimie's body was later found about 500 meters from their home in Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture, about a month later.

"She may have been alive if I had searched for her immediately after the tsunami struck," Yoshida said. He holds deep regrets and some resentment. "If it had not been for the nuclear plant accident. ..."

Yoshida was born and raised in Futaba, one of the two municipalities that host the nuclear plant. He lost Kimie, then 42, to the tsunami spawned by the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake.

On that day, Yoshida was working at an office of his TEPCO-affiliated company in the Fukushima No. 1 plant complex when the earthquake struck.

His company told its employees at the plant to return home. Driving on higher ground, Yoshida saw that his house was gone.

The central government issued an evacuation order to residents around the plant.

Unable to find Kimie, Masashi moved from one place to another, including Minami-Soma in Fukushima Prefecture and Saitama Prefecture.

He returned to work after two months, partly because he wanted to keep his mind busy and off his grief. His job included material procurement duties, and he was stationed at J-Village, a soccer facility before it was used as a base station for workers responding to the Fukushima No. 1 plant accident.

In December, he started working on-site at the Fukushima plant.

His hometown neighborhood is covered with overgrown weeds and debris. Search efforts for missing people are still ongoing. He joins in the searches with the regret that he was not able to find his wife in 2011.

Yoshida lives by himself. He awakens at 4:30 a.m. on weekdays and heads for the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. He purchases premade foods for dinner at the supermarket.

On chilly days, he misses Kimie's favorite, "nabe" hot-pot dishes cooked at the table.

Upon graduation from high school, Yoshida was employed by a TEPCO-related company and assigned to the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

When he was introduced to Kimie by a friend, he was attracted by her smile. They were married in May 2000.

The couple would go shopping together and eat out on her birthday and their wedding anniversary.

Yoshida continues to work at the Fukushima plant with mixed emotions--an attachment to his employer of 30 years, and gratitude for the support it has provided the community, along with his livelihood.

However, lingering resentment remains in Yoshida that he was unable to save his wife.

"I cannot explain the feeling," he said.

Cultural undertakings in Fukushima

March 10, 2015

Editorial: Cultural programs seek to share burden faced by Fukushima

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20150310p2a00m0na012000c.html>

Four years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear crisis, but a long road to recovery still lies ahead.

Culture has played a valuable role in the rebuilding of areas hit hardest by the triple disasters. In Fukushima, various efforts are being carried out to accommodate and share in the trials and tribulations residents there face even today.

Just recently, the announcement by Tokyo-based anime production company Gainax Co. on its plans to open a subsidiary called Fukushima Gainax in the Fukushima Prefecture town of Miharuru in April drew widespread attention. Gainax -- whose animated film "Aoki Uru" (Uru in blue) is currently in production for its 2018 premiere -- will rent a former Miharuru municipal junior high school to house its Fukushima-based facilities, which will include a studio and museum. The latter will offer exhibits and classes in which visitors can experience the production process of anime, as well as events by voice actors.

Of particular note is the production company's plan to cooperate with a technical school in Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture, to allow students to gain work experience at the studio and to offer them employment opportunities after graduation. Nurturing a new generation of animators is not an easy feat, especially in a short span of time, but Fukushima Gainax President Yoshinori Asao seems intent to take on the challenge. "We want to produce new animators from this local area."

Meanwhile, "Nocturne," a play about the 2011 triple disasters written by So Kuramoto and performed by his Furano Group theater company, is currently touring the country, including hard-hit areas in the northeast. The play is set in a house by the sea in an area that has been designated a no-go zone because of the nuclear disaster. It portrays survivors' grief while questioning society's dependence on nuclear power, and urges audiences to consider the nuclear disaster as their own problem.

"I feel as though people in Tokyo have forgotten about Fukushima," says Kuramoto.

A program launched by novelist Hideo Furukawa, originally from Koriyama, is also striking. At "Tadayou manabiya bungaku no gakko" (Drifting school of literature), Fukushima residents are encouraged to express the situations and emotions they experience in their own words. The program was held free of charge in Koriyama and other parts of the prefecture last year, with lectures and workshops offered by sociologist Hiroshi Kainuma, novelist Hiromi Kawakami, and translator Motoyuki Shibata. Participants are broken up into small groups, allowing close contact with instructors.

"Discussions on topics such as the relationship between regional areas and the capital broadened and deepened," says program director Shoichiro Mori. Another round is set to take place in Koriyama this November.

The abovementioned projects all seek to prevent Fukushima from becoming isolated, and to share the burden of the problems the embattled prefecture faces.

The accomplishments of cultural undertakings can be difficult to see at first glance. But they touch people's hearts and become etched in their memories. They encourage adults and cultivate youth. They

continue to entertain and enlighten, their effects lasting for years. We hope such cultural efforts will contribute to creating a bright future for Fukushima.

Transfer of radioactive soil starts

March 13, 2015

Delivery of radioactive soil to interim storage begins in Fukushima

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/13/national/delivery-of-radioactive-soil-to-interim-storage-begins-in-fukushima/#.VQMyfOF1Cos>



Kyodo

FUKUSHIMA – Workers on Friday began delivering soil and other radiation-tainted waste generated by the decontamination work following the 2011 Fukushima nuclear crisis to a makeshift storage yard at a storage facility in the prefecture.

The government plans to build depositories on around 16 sq. km of land in the towns of Okuma and Futaba, which host the crippled Fukushima No. 1 power plant, to eventually store massive amounts of radioactive waste. But the plan remains highly uncertain amid slow progress in negotiations with landowners.

Contaminated waste was delivered Friday to a section of the site in Okuma, but shipments to the Futaba section were delayed until March 25 at the request of local authorities.

The Environment Ministry decided to move **the waste — still being stored near residents' homes and other places across the prefecture four years after the crisis began** — to the temporary storage yard.

“The start of delivery marks a major step forward for the rebirth and reconstruction of Fukushima. I’d like to thank local communities for accepting it,” Environment Minister Yoshio Mochizuki told a news conference Friday.

Over the next year, around 43,000 cu. meters of waste — equivalent to less than 1 percent of the estimated total of 22 million cu. meters created by the Fukushima No. 1 reactor meltdowns — will be delivered, the ministry said.

The government is negotiating with about 2,400 landowners to secure the land needed for the facilities, but many people have voiced strong concern that the storage could end up being permanent if the land is acquired by the state. Others are refusing to sell because the land was owned by their families for generations.

March 12, 2015

Transfer of tainted Fukushima soil starts

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150313_01.html

Mar. 12, 2015 - Updated 21:54 UTC+1

Transfer of tainted Fukushima soil to start

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Mar. 12, 2015 - Updated 21:54 UTC+1

As cleanup work continues, workers in Fukushima Prefecture will start transferring contaminated materials to an intermediate storage facility.

Soil and debris tainted by nuclear fallout from the 2011 accident have been piling up across the prefecture.

Construction of a storage facility began only last month due to difficulties in finding a suitable site. It is located in an area between 2 towns near the stricken nuclear plant. The transfer will start on Friday, without waiting for completion of the facility.

The Environment Ministry is aiming to transport 1,000 cubic meters of contaminated materials each from 43 municipalities in the prefecture, during the first year.

So far the government has only secured enough land to accommodate 20,000 cubic meters, roughly 0.1 percent of the planned size.

The completed 16-square-kilometers intermediate storage facility will hold up to 22 million cubic meters of contaminated soil and debris.

It is unclear when construction of the facility will be completed due to difficult negotiations with landowners.

At the same time the government must start looking for a final disposal site for the contaminated

materials. Officials promised the citizens of Fukushima that if they host the intermediate facility for 30 years, the final storage site would be outside their prefecture.

People from Okuma, one of the 2 towns hosting the intermediate facility, have expressed mixed feelings.

A man in his 30s who used to live within the planned site said he has given up returning to the town. He believes the intermediate facility will end up becoming the final one, as other prefectures will not want to accept the contaminated debris.

A woman whose home stands near the planned site said she will not be able to return to her hometown when the facility is completed.

Soil transport starts four years later

March 13, 2015

FOUR YEARS AFTER: Fukushima cleanup takes step forward on 4th anniversary of first explosion

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201503130038>



Workers continue their decommissioning efforts at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant on the night of March 12. The luminous line in front is the Joban Expressway, which fully opened on March 1. (Wataru Sekita)

March 12 marked the fourth anniversary of the first hydrogen explosion at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, a terrifying moment in Japan's worst nuclear disaster.

Four years later, work started to transport soil and other debris contaminated by the radioactive substances to intermediate storage facilities near the stricken nuclear plant.

"It is a major step forward for Fukushima's recovery, and we will make a renewed commitment to proceeding with the construction of the storage facilities while fulfilling our responsibility to fully explain the situation to local authorities," Environment Minister Yoshio Mochizuki said March 13.

A day after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami knocked out power at the plant, the explosion rocked the No. 1 reactor building, followed by two other explosions at the No. 3 and No. 4 reactor buildings. Meltdowns occurred at the No. 1, 2 and 3 reactors, causing the plant to spew radioactive substances over the surrounding areas.

The damaged reactor buildings, a large number of tanks storing contaminated water and other structures at the plant were brightly lit up on the night of March 12 as Tokyo Electric Power Co., the plant's operator, continued its decommissioning work.

A luminous line of the Joban Expressway was also visible from a hill in the town of Tomioka near the plant. The final stretch of the expressway, which runs past the nuclear plant, was completed on March 1. The Environment Ministry has kicked off an experimental project to study the safety of transporting a large amount of contaminated materials. It plans to bring radioactive debris from 43 municipalities across Fukushima Prefecture to the intermediate storage sites over a year.

The total amount of contaminated soil and materials will be 22 million cubic meters, and they will be stored at the intermediate facilities for a maximum 30 years, ministry officials said.

Still looking for rightful owners

March 14, 2015

FOUR YEARS AFTER: Fukushima city offers last look in effort to return unclaimed items from 2011 disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201503140016>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

MINAMI-SOMA, Fukushima Prefecture--For the final time, unclaimed photographs, notebooks and other items salvaged from the detritus of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami are on display here at the Recycle Plaza in Haramachi Ward.

Four years after the disaster, Minami-Soma officials are still hoping to return the items to their owners in what they say is their final effort through a public display.

More than 50,000 photos and 10,000 articles are unclaimed, including certificates, notebooks and household items. The lost and damaged items have been washed and rinsed by volunteers.

The exhibition at the Recycle Plaza will run through March 16, and the items can be viewed from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

After the showing, the city will store the items, and those still searching for their lost mementos and possessions can view photographs of the unclaimed items on a database at the city hall.

Fukushima volunteers

March 13, 2015

Volunteers risk radiation exposure to decontaminate Fukushima zone

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150312p2a00m0na011000c.html>

MINAMISOMA, Fukushima -- On Feb. 21, 24 volunteers cleared away a 10-meter-tall bamboo grove in the Odaka district here -- an area contaminated with radioactive materials from the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

The group used handsaws and chainsaws to cut down the stems on a slope, and then fed them into a wood chipper. Half of the volunteers were women, and some of them were still of high school age. Among them was a 17-year-old girl from Chiba Prefecture, who took part in the program for the first time with her classmate. "I'm glad I can be of help to someone," she said.

The Odaka district, which lies within a 20 kilometer radius of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, is designated as a "zone preparing for evacuation orders to be lifted" where residents are not allowed to take up lodgings as a general rule. Although the district is subject to government-led decontamination efforts, workers have yet to come into the area and its vicinity to do their work. The 17-year-old girl admitted that her family was worried about her taking part in the volunteer program, but she said, "I thought it would be all right after seeing their activities online."

According to Mitsuo Matsumoto, who heads the Minamisoma Volunteer Activity Center, airborne radiation levels are measured in the area before any work is done, and if the level is 2.5 microsieverts per hour or more, no work is carried out. If air dose rates are 1.5 microsieverts per hour or higher, only older volunteer workers are sent to the site. The level at the site on Feb. 21 was below 1.0 microsieverts per hour, Matsumoto says.

Mayuko Izumida, a 43-year-old part-time worker from Yokohama comes to the district approximately once every three months.

"I have been visiting 'at my own risk,' no matter what happens in the future," she says.

Ichiro Higashikawa, a 48-year-old man in the restaurant business from Tokyo's Koto Ward, was removing mud from a ditch next to a rice field in the Odaka district on Feb. 21. He said that he initially brought a dosimeter with him to measure air doses. He no longer does so, however, because he has gotten used to the situation in the area. Still, this does not mean he is unconcerned. "Under normal conditions, this is what the government should do more, not us," he says.

A worker engaged in government-led decontamination work in a different area was surprised to learn about the volunteer work.

"That's the same as some of our work," the worker said. "Caution should be exercised because air doses on the mountainside can be about 2 microsieverts per hour higher than those in other places."

Usually, volunteer work is not ongoing like the work of those hired specifically to do the cleaning. Still, the question remains as to why volunteers are risking exposure to radiation to perform their tasks. The

reason is because the decontamination policy of the Ministry of the Environment does not live up to residents' expectations.

According to the Ministry of the Environment, decontamination work, as a general rule, does not extend to felling trees. Workers merely prune evergreen conifers, such as cedars, to a height of 4 meters from the ground. As for forest zones within a radius of 20 meters from residential areas, decontamination workers make it a standard practice to remove fallen leaves. They prune trees only when they judge them to be greatly affecting human life. The decontamination policy focuses on ground surfaces where radioactive substances move around in rain and with fallen leaves over time. However, the 4-meter rule for evergreen trees is scientifically invalid.

Municipal governments follow the central government's decontamination policy. But in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Nihonmatsu, the local government felled almost all trees at elementary and junior high schools in fiscal 2012 at its own discretion because radiation dose remained high around trees there even after cleansing work was carried out. As result, airborne radiation levels at all 23 schools dropped by as much as 20 percent. Such being the case, it is natural that some people want to have trees cut down. The Mainichi Shimbun accompanied Matsumoto on a survey. Behind the house of the 67-year-old woman who requested the survey was a bamboo grove. She said she was told by a decontamination worker commissioned by the Environment Ministry, "We're not going to cut down the bamboo grove. If you want to have it cleared, please ask volunteers." The woman has been living alone in a temporary housing unit away from her son's family, with whom she had lived before the triple disaster. Volunteers are her only source of help.

When the woman bowed her head and apologized for requesting the work, Matsumoto told her, "The government is to blame. In fact, you could go further and lay the blame on Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO)." Among sites Matsumoto's group has surveyed are those with air dose rates of 8 microsieverts per hour or higher. Matsumoto pulled out a dosimeter from his work clothes and said, "There were times when the accumulated dose reached 2,500 microsieverts in one month."

The Mainichi visited an office of an Iwaki-based group which was conducting volunteer activities in "difficult-to-return zones," where people are not allowed to enter, with the exception of reconstruction workers and residents returning to their homes temporarily.

Tsutomu Hirayama, 48, who heads "So-So Volunteer," is from the Fukushima Prefecture town of Tomioka. At the request of his friend, he took up volunteer work, shuttling local residents to and from their homes in "no-go zones" for temporary visits. He founded the volunteer organization in 2013 after seeing residents dumfounded when they returned to their homes temporarily. The grass was growing in front of the doorsteps of their houses and the rooms inside were in wild disorder, having been burgled. After he had his group's flyers inserted in public relations magazines published by local governments in the Futaba district, his group started to receive requests for help.

Five to eight volunteer workers can enter a local resident's home as "accompanying business operators" when that resident makes a temporary visit. Up to two cars carrying volunteer workers can travel with the local resident on their temporary visit. Wearing radiation protection suits, the volunteer workers, equipped with dosimeters, clean up their homes and mow the grass, among other tasks.

"When the airborne radiation level exceeds 10 microsieverts per hour, we will consult with volunteer workers on the spot," Hirayama said. "But they come to do the work with full knowledge (of the risks), and they all carry out their work." When he was cleaning up the house of a woman in her 80s in Futaba who had lost her husband after the triple disaster, Hirayama found her husband's favorite items. The woman was overjoyed. Hirayama commented, "At the very least, I hope they will find motivation for living during temporary returns to their homes."

An official of the Tomioka Labor Standards Supervision Office, which oversees the Futaba district, looked miffed when the topic of volunteers came up.

"Volunteers are not under our jurisdiction." The official said. "Volunteer work in difficult-to-return zones? I have never heard of it." (By Shunsuke Sekiya and Tomoki Okuyama, Tokyo City News Department)

March 13, 2015

Treatment of evacuees requests to move varies a lot

March 13, 2015

Local gov'ts differ sharply over evacuees' requests to move house

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150313p2a00m0na006000c.html>

Tokyo and four other prefectures deal differently with requests from evacuees from the Fukushima nuclear disaster to move house from their free temporary housing, according to data obtained by the Mainichi Shimbun through freedom of information requests.

Tokyo and nearby Saitama and Kanagawa prefectures have approved of six to 10 cases while Niigata Prefecture has sanctioned as many as 130 cases. Although evacuees are being forced to stay longer in Tokyo, Saitama, Kanagawa, Niigata and Yamagata prefectures as well as other prefectures due to the lingering nuclear accident, the central government does not allow them to move house except for those returning to Fukushima. These local governments address exceptional cases differently, breeding distrust among evacuees.

There are no regulations for moving house from private and public housing leased by the central government for evacuees of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami and subsequent Fukushima nuclear disaster. The central government made it clear in May 2012 that it is offering free temporary housing to evacuees and won't permit them to move house, except for unavoidable cases unless they move into permanent housing. But the central government allows evacuees from Fukushima to move into empty units inside temporary housing complexes there as part of a campaign to encourage former Fukushima residents to return to their hometowns.

By way of freedom of information requests, the Mainichi obtained documents on bilateral consultations between Fukushima Prefecture and Tokyo, Saitama, Kanagawa, Yamagata and Niigata prefectures. The Fukushima Prefectural Government says the issue of moving house is at the discretion of local bodies hosting evacuees. But the Disaster Relief Act defines the governors of disaster-hit prefectures as providers of temporary housing, and it has become a custom for evacuee-accommodating local governments to negotiate with Fukushima Prefecture.

According to information and other data obtained by the Mainichi, in September 2012 Yamagata Prefecture announced standards for exceptionally approving of moving house. It cited 1) health conditions, 2) landlords' wishes, 3) increasing numbers of family members and 4) significant disadvantages and dangers due to remaining in temporary housing and announced plans to approve of moving house after consultations with Fukushima. In January 2013, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government also set similar standards except for an expansion of family members.

But Tokyo and the four other prefectures operate very differently. For example, Yamagata Prefecture actively authorizes evacuees to move house if evacuees have trouble with neighbors by sending documents on the wishes of landlords and medical certificates to Fukushima Prefecture. At present, Yamagata even allows evacuees to move house if reasons such as landlords' wishes and health conditions are verified, without consulting Fukushima Prefecture. Many details of documents on requests from evacuees living in Tokyo are classified, but the Tokyo Metropolitan Government consults with Fukushima only if evacuees' requests to move house meet the standards.

Saitama Prefecture in principle consults with Fukushima Prefecture upon request from evacuees and leaves a decision up to the latter. Niigata Prefecture makes decisions along Fukushima's line of thinking but does not check with Fukushima in many cases in which it approves of evacuees' requests to move house. It consulted with Fukushima over only six cases in which it hesitated what to do. It's not clear why there are many cases in which Niigata approved of evacuees' requests to move house. Kanagawa approved of six cases, including four involving landlords' wishes, and checked with Fukushima about the remaining two cases.

The National Governors' Association and Yamagata Prefecture have urged the central government to flexibly deal with evacuees' requests to move house. The Japan Federation of Bar Associations submitted a written opinion to the central government in July last year calling for the government to approve of evacuees' requests to move house more flexibly.

Evacuees not always entitled to alternative housing

March 13, 2015

Some evacuee families unable to get compensation for alternative housing

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150313p2a00m0na015000c.html>

Some Fukushima nuclear disaster evacuees have been unable to get alternative housing recognized as evacuation destinations even though their current residences have become small for their growing families, it has been learned.

Local governments have largely differed in how they handle the issue, with the metropolitan area being stricter about allowing home changes, perhaps because of the more difficult housing situation there. For voluntary disaster evacuees and evacuees from areas that have had their evacuation orders lifted, however, whether or not they can get an alternative home compensated as their evacuation site ties directly into whether they can continue to live in evacuation housing or not, and they are strongly seeking the cooperation of government institutions.

One 32-year-old woman who evacuated from the city of Fukushima lives with her non-Japanese husband and four children in a Tokyo suburb. At the time of the disaster she was pregnant with her third child, and she fled to Tokyo out of concern for radiation effects on the children. In November last year she had her fourth child.

The home is 52 square meters in size. They do not have a table where the family can eat as one, and they can only place one study desk for the children. Every night, the woman sleeps together with three of the children. She has applied to the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and other bodies to have an alternative home compensated as an evacuation site, but has been turned down because growth in family size does not constitute a reason for a new evacuation home under the Tokyo Metropolitan Government's

guidelines. She hears that radiation levels are still high around her home in Fukushima, and says, "I cannot let my children go there." She says, "I just have to raise the children while withstanding that we have nothing."

Another woman in her 50s who evacuated from the city of Fukushima lives in Kawasaki with her son in a one-room apartment. Just after the disaster, she found the apartment with the help of an acquaintance. "First of all I just wanted a place to live. I didn't think I would be living here this long," she says. While her son uses the dining table for his studies, she uses the top of a cardboard box as a table to fill in school forms. They use the bathroom area to change clothes.

Since the summer of 2013, she has contacted the governments of Kanagawa Prefecture and Fukushima Prefecture and the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare to have an alternative home authorized for compensation, but she was turned down, with lack of space not being considered a sufficient reason for a change.

However, in January this year, she was called by an official with the Kanagawa Prefectural Government, who told her, "The landlord doesn't want to renew your contract. Please find an alternative home and leave your current one by the end of March." As a result, she will get another home recognized as her evacuation site.

"Why wouldn't they allow it until now? I wish they would think not just of the landlord but of the children as well," she said angrily.

Ideas more important than aid

March 13, 2015

EDITORIAL: Tsunami-hit areas need business ideas more than aid

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201503130029>



Behind the reproduced “miracle pine tree,” large conveyor-belt facilities are used in public works to elevate low-lying land in Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture. (Asahi Shimbun file photo)

Nobuaki Sasaki is looking for companies that can provide business-based support to help rebuild his disaster-hit hometown, Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture.

In a get-to-know-you meeting held in Tokyo in December last year, Sasaki said, “We are grateful for the support we have received so far, and we now need a business partner.”

The meeting was organized by the Iwate prefectural government to give local nonprofit organizations an opportunity to talk with companies in the Tokyo metropolitan area.

Sasaki heads Save Takata, an incorporated association set up to heal and regenerate Rikuzentakata. The coastal city was devastated by the towering tsunami triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake, which hit the Tohoku region in March 2011.

Sasaki immediately started an activity to help people affected by the disaster, and it has since grown into a project focused on building a new future for the city.

Sasaki wants to help increase production of apples in the city by establishing a full-fledged business that sells jam and juice made from the fruit.

A unique feature of Sasaki’s business plan is employing young people, especially so-called NEETs (not in education, employment or training), from outside the prefecture.

This approach, he thinks, will help NEETs restart their careers while increasing the young population in the city, which is graying and shrinking, a trend accelerated by the March 11 disaster.

DEPENDENCE ON AID HAS ITS LIMIT

Sasaki thinks companies are no longer very responsive to simple calls for help from disaster-hit areas. His proposal is based on the hope that even companies that are not linked to Rikuzentakata may be interested

in a project that is designed to tackle both the challenge of revitalizing the local economy and Japan's social challenge of supporting NEETs.

Four years after the calamity, public works to elevate low-lying land to build houses on higher ground are under way in wide areas along the Pacific coast in the Tohoku region, mainly in Iwate and Miyagi prefectures.

The land-zoning project, which is the central element of the overall regional redevelopment plan, covers more than 1,400 hectares in 50 districts, an area equivalent to 300 Tokyo Domes. But the project is nothing but a first step in the long process of reviving local communities.

Since the earthquake and tsunami left more than 18,000 people dead or missing, most of the 40-plus hardest-hit municipalities have seen huge and accelerating outflows of residents. The total population of these municipalities has declined by nearly 7 percent from the pre-disaster level. In 10 towns and cities, the population has plunged by a double-digit rate.

Regenerating local communities under such circumstances requires new industries. Cooperation with companies that know how to maintain and expand profitable businesses is essential.

Members of the business community, mainly large companies, have been making various efforts to support affected areas, such as providing donations, dispatching volunteers and buying products made in these areas, as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR).

Four years on, however, it is hard to deny that their interest in supporting Tohoku has waned. It is especially difficult for companies to continue with costly and purely social contributions because they need to consider the interests of their shareholders.

Companies should change their approaches by finding business opportunities that support the region while generating profits for themselves.

Disaster-stricken areas with declining populations may not qualify as attractive markets. Still, companies should boldly start new businesses in these areas.

They should regard expansion in ravaged areas as investments for future opportunities to change themselves. Business operations in these areas could help the companies develop new ways of thinking through talks with local governments, other companies and NPOs about specific revitalization measures. Through these discussions, the companies could come up with ideas for new businesses by shaking the mind-set of stability-oriented employees.

CSR-BASED PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

In fact, some companies have already started unique activities in Tohoku under such a strategy.

In 2012, a year after the disaster, major cosmetics maker Shiseido Co., which celebrated its 140th anniversary then, pondered ways to support the region through a project related to "tsubaki" (Camellia japonica), which is the company's trademark.

Shiseido learned that the city of Ofunato, Iwate Prefecture, whose symbol flower is tsubaki, has a traditional culture of using oil pressed from Camellia seeds for hair care and other purposes. The city had actually started making efforts to use tsubaki to re-energize the local economy before the disaster.

Shiseido rolled out an aid project designed to increase tsubaki in the city to heighten its attraction as a tourist destination and increase production of tsubaki oil to lay the foundation for the development of tsubaki industries.

The project, using the slogan "Urban development for the future 10 years from now," involved rather low-profile efforts, such as planting tsubaki and holding events to make the flower familiar to consumers.

Last autumn, Shiseido brought the CSR project into the stage of actual business operations.

The company collected the fragrance of what is said to be the nation's oldest "yabutsubaki" (Camellia japonica var. japonica), which is in Ofunato, and reproduced the fragrance at its lab.

Shiseido developed a perfume based on the fragrance and put the product on the market.

Part of the sales of the perfume is donated to rebuilding efforts. The business grew out of a fact-finding survey of evacuees living in temporary housing. The company decided to develop a perfume to help people relax after hearing many evacuees complain about difficulties in trying to sleep.

The originally planned 5,000 units of the perfume have been sold out, and the company is now working to make more.

There should be similar attempts to help disaster-affected areas.

Onagawa, a fishing town in eastern Miyagi Prefecture located at the root of the Oshika Peninsula, which juts out into the Pacific, is calling on companies to use the town for business experiences.

IDEAS RATHER THAN FACTORIES

The town's population has decreased by nearly 30 percent in the past four years, the worst demographic decline among all affected municipalities.

Onagawa has led the pack in carrying out infrastructure projects, including elevating land for new housing. In late March, the town will declare its rebirth to mark the resumption of operations of a Japan Railway line and JR Onagawa Station. But local residents are deeply worried about the future of the town. A Future Center will be opened soon ahead of the scheduled reopening of the shopping district near the station. The center is designed as an open public facility for meetings and discussions among people, both residents of the town and outsiders, to create new businesses.

Asuenokibou (hope for tomorrow), an NPO, operates the center to serve as a mediator between the public and private sectors.

"We want to see companies come here to find seeds of profits," says Yosuke Komatsu, who heads the NPO. "We need ideas more than factories."

Efforts to rebuild local communities shattered by the 2011 disaster will pick up speed in the coming years. There are certain types of contribution that only businesses can make.

--The Asahi Shimbun, March 13

53 families in evacuation zones since 2011

March 12, 2015

53 families live in Fukushima evacuation zones

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150313_02.html

Mar. 12, 2015 - Updated 17:51 UTC+1

NHK has learned that 4 years after the nuclear disaster members of 53 households are living in the areas still designated as evacuation zones around the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

There are currently 10 municipalities around the crippled plant where the Japanese government has established evacuation zones due to high levels of radioactive fallout.

The zones are divided into 3 types based on levels of radioactivity. The government allows residents from the middle and lower level types to return home temporarily during the daytime. No overnight stays are allowed anywhere within the zones.

NHK talked with groups doing security patrols, and has found people live in at least 53 households in the zone. Some live in the most contaminated areas.

The residents reportedly say it is difficult to adapt to a new environment. Others comment they have to take care of livestock left in the zone.

A man who chose to remain to oversee livestock told NHK that he could not abandon the animals and wants to stay in his hometown his whole life.

Relevant government officials say they have repeatedly warned residents of the risk of radioactivity and urged them to leave. The law stipulates no punishment for remaining.

The budget for reconstruction

March 11, 2015

News Navigator: What is the budget for reconstruction?

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20150311p2a00m0na014000c.html>

The Mainichi answers some common questions readers may have about the budget for reconstruction.

Question: Minister for Reconstruction Wataru Takeshita has proposed a review of the budget for reconstruction in areas hit by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. What's the mechanism of the recovery budget?

Answer: In the first move of its kind since the end of World War II, a special account for reconstruction was set up apart from the general account, due to the enormous expenditure necessary for restoration from the 2011 quake disaster. Under a basic reconstruction policy laid out by then Prime Minister Naoto Kan's Cabinet in July 2011, a 10-year reconstruction period was spelled out to continue until fiscal 2020. The first five years during that period was defined as an "intensive recovery period," for which an approximately 19 trillion yen budget was allocated. After the government changed hands, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe boosted the budget to some 25 trillion yen in January 2013, pledging to accelerate restoration efforts. In the fiscal 2015 budget draft, the budget allocation was further hiked to 26.3 trillion yen.

Q: What's the breakdown of the budget funds?

A: The highest proportion comes from the tax increase for reconstruction at 10.5 trillion yen, followed by non-tax revenues and cuts in expenditures at 8.5 trillion yen, proceeds from the sale of Japan Post shares at 4 trillion yen, and a settlement surplus at 3.3 trillion yen. The 1.3 trillion yen extra amount added to the initially set 25 trillion yen under the Abe government is to be funded by the settlement surplus in the general account at 0.7 trillion yen and a surplus in the fiscal investment and loan special account at 0.6 trillion yen.

Q: For what projects is the reconstruction budget used?

A: The recovery budget is spent on government-led reconstruction projects such as roads and breakwaters for disaster restoration, subsidies to local governments for building disaster restoration housing and developing land for relocating residences to upland areas, and special grants to cover expenses for dispatching employees to disaster-hit municipalities, among other destinations.

Out of the approximately 25.1 trillion yen set aside for the reconstruction budget by fiscal 2013, roughly 5 trillion yen remains unused, according to the Board of Audit, raising questions about the way budgets are executed. A review of the reconstruction budget should investigate issues, including budget implementation, from the inside out. (Answers by Akira Matsumoto, Political News Department)

Panoramic view of abandoned school

<http://www.asahi.com/panorama/150220ukedoprimarieschool/>

More about Asahi's coverage of 3/11 disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/tag/FOUR%20YEARS%20AFTER>

Ban Ki-moon impressed by Fukushima students

March 15, 2015

U.N. chief Ban says students in Fukushima impressed him

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/15/national/u-n-chief-ban-says-students-in-fukushima-impressed-him/#.VQV_j-F1Cos

JJI

SENDAI – United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said Sunday he was impressed by the high school students in Fukushima when he visited the disaster-hit prefecture four years ago.

The students had experienced such a terrible tragedy and some of them had lost their parents, some of their friends or their houses, Ban said.

“I wanted to show the world’s solidarity with the people of Fukushima. But the students here surprised me by showing their solidarity with the world,” he said.

“Now, I expected that these students would ask me, ask the United Nations, for help. But instead of asking for aid or material help, they asked me questions, ‘How could we work with the United Nations to help other people in other parts of the world just to avoid this kind of tragic disaster?’

“That really struck me and inspired me. I was truly moved,” Ban said at a symposium at Tohoku University in Sendai, held on the sidelines of the third U.N. World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction.

The international community and the United Nations are supporting Japan’s vibrant reconstruction from the quake, tsunami and nuclear crisis, Ban said at the symposium, joined by more than 1,000 university students and citizens.

“We cannot prevent natural disasters. This will be God’s will. But at least we can prepare ourselves how to minimize disaster risk. We can reduce disaster risk. This is the main purpose of our meeting in Sendai,” he said.

Thailand to ease rules

Thailand plans to ease import restrictions on Japanese food shortly, interim Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha said Saturday in Sendai.

Prayuth made the comments during a meeting with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on the sidelines of the U.N. disaster risk conference in Sendai.

Abe asked Prayuth to abolish the restrictions introduced after the triple reactor core meltdown at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The meltdowns were triggered by the March 2011 earthquake when the resulting tsunami knocked out its cooling systems.

Noting Prayuth used the Tohoku Shinkansen Line to get to Sendai, Abe repeated that Japan wants to actively cooperate in railway infrastructure development in Thailand.

The two leaders also reaffirmed their countries will strengthen security cooperation through dialogue between their foreign and defense officials.

Disaster ministers meet

Disaster Management Minister Eriko Yamatani and her Chinese counterpart, Li Ligu, on Sunday each praised their respective anti-disaster efforts and agreed to continue them.

Li, civil affairs minister, is the first Chinese Cabinet minister to visit Japan since April 2012.

Relations between the two have been strained since Tokyo nationalized three of the Senkaku Islands, in the East China Sea, in September 2012. The islands are also claimed by Beijing and Taiwan.

The Yamatani-Li meeting is considered a further sign of improvement in bilateral ties after Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Chinese President Xi Jinping held their first summit in November.

Also, for the first time in about four years, their senior foreign policy and defense officials are scheduled to attend a meeting Thursday.

Yamatani and Li met on the sidelines of the third U.N. World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai. At a ministerial roundtable session held as part of the conference Sunday, Li expressed China's positive stance toward global anti-disaster cooperation.

Deaths caused by refugee life

March 15, 2015

Death toll grows in 3/11 aftermath

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/15/national/death-toll-grows-in-311-aftermath/#.VQV-xeF1Cos>

Fukushima Minpo

The number of nuclear evacuees dying from deteriorating health caused by refugee life is still growing even though four years have passed since the unprecedented calamity that struck on March 11, 2011.

As of March 4, the deaths of 1,867 people in Fukushima Prefecture had been recognized as related to the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear crisis, surpassing the 1,603 who are deemed to have been killed there directly by the quake and tsunami.

Nearly 120,000 people in the prefecture are still living as evacuees, stuck in stressful environments.

Among the three prefectures hit hardest— Fukushima, Iwate and Miyagi — Fukushima has a particularly high “disaster-related death” ratio of 54 percent compared with “direct deaths.” By municipality, Minamisoma led with 469 related deaths, followed by Namie at 342, Tomioka at 291, and Iwaki at 130. In Iwate and Miyagi, by contrast, the ratio of disaster-related deaths is only around 9 percent for each. Iwate had 450 related deaths versus 4,672 direct deaths, while Miyagi had 909 and 9,621, respectively. Many suicides have been reported in Fukushima amid the growing despair caused by the prolonged evacuation.

A death is recognized as disaster-related if it is deemed by a panel of doctors, lawyers and other experts to have a causal relationship with the quake, tsunami or nuclear disaster.

For each such death, ¥5 million in condolence money is paid to the family’s main breadwinner, and ¥2.5 million to others.

But objections from relatives of dead people who are not recognized as disaster victims by the panel are rising as the evacuation drags on.

According to Fukushima Minpo’s tally of data from 24 municipalities, there have been at least 46 objections, including 19 in Iwaki and 13 in Minamisoma.

Lawyers say the kin of those not recognized are frustrated because there are no clear standards for determining who should be recognized as having died from disaster-related causes. They fear that the number of objections filed will increase as it will be even more difficult to prove a causal relationship between a death and a disaster as time passes.

Some are calling for setting up a mechanism to pay out condolence money specifically for deaths related to stress caused by the nuclear disaster.

Meanwhile, municipalities hosting large numbers of evacuees are improving efforts to visit residents in temporary housing to check on their health.

As of the end of January, about 14,600 people from the town of Namie were still living in temporary housing in the prefecture, while some 6,400 others were living as evacuees elsewhere.

Twenty-five counselors from the Namie municipal welfare office are making routine visits to such housing units to check on people living alone so solitary deaths can be prevented.

The town has also placed 30 staff in 10 prefectures around the country, including Kyoto and Fukuoka, to provide support for residents who fled Fukushima.

The staff visit the homes of such people individually and listen to them to ease the loneliness of living far away from home.

They also hold gatherings for the evacuees so they can socialize and talk with one another. In Chiba Prefecture, such efforts have led to residents themselves holding tea parties for displaced people in the neighborhood.

“It’s difficult to look after people scattered around in such a vast area, but we want to continue providing support for each and every one of them,” said one of the Namie welfare office staff.

In Minamisoma, prefectural officials and the municipal welfare office staff work as a team on home visits. Prefectural officials make the rounds of temporary housing units on weekdays, while the welfare office staffers pay daily visits to both temporary and rented units, as well as to permanent public housing units for evacuees.

The city and Minamisoma police have also set up a “three-day rule” under which welfare staff report to the city and police if no physical meeting is reported for three days from residents of the homes they visit. The rule was established after a number of elderly living alone were found dead last spring, sometimes days or weeks after the fact.

While some initially felt the frequent visits were intrusions, others began making their own rounds to check on neighbors, municipal officials said.

The city and police have also established a network with newspaper and milk delivery personnel to routinely check on the elderly.

The city and police have also established a network with newspaper and milk delivery personnel to routinely check on the elderly.

In November, a milk delivery person found an elderly woman collapsed in a public housing unit, saving her life.

Mixed feelings about interim storage

March 14, 2015

Fukushima residents find it hard to come to terms with interim storage for tainted soil

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150314p2a00m0na010000c.html>

OKUMA, Fukushima -- Soil tainted with radioactive substances from the crippled nuclear power station was delivered for the first time on March 13 to a site where the government plans to build a temporary storage facility.

Only 12 cubic meters of tainted soil in so-called flexible containers was transferred to the site on the first day. The government has yet to show a work schedule as to when it will finish transporting tainted soil whose total volume is equal to filling Tokyo Dome 18 times. There is no guarantee that the government will abide by its promise to store tainted soil there for no more than 30 years. Therefore, the delivery of contaminated soil has left many questions unanswered for local residents.

The governments of Okuma and Futaba made a painful decision to accept the central government's storage plan, but local residents, particularly land owners and leaseholders, were watching the first delivery of tainted soil with mixed feelings.

"It is said that the negotiations between the government and landowners on land procurements have made little headway, but there has been no negotiations with us. We can't go along with the start of delivery at this stage," said a 66-year-old woman who has her house on a tract of land where the government plans to build a temporary storage facility.

Her house is located within a three-kilometer radius of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. Even before the Fukushima Prefectural Government decided to accept the central government's plan to build a temporary storage facility there, the woman had shown understanding of the plan, saying, "Unless some place accepts it, there will be no reconstruction for Fukushima." But even if she sold her property to the state, it would remain unclear how the tract of land would be used and whether she would be able to go there again.

She also wonders how the government will haul "important things that are irreplaceable with money" out of her house and decontaminate them. Although there are so many things she wants to confirm, she says

she has not received any clear explanations from the government. "Although landowners' questions remain unanswered, it appears to me that things are forcibly moving ahead," she said.

Noriko Onodera, a 63-year-old woman who had evacuated from Futaba to Iwaki in Fukushima Prefecture, has her house outside the planned site for the temporary storage facility. But she said, "It is distressing and sad to see contaminated soil gathering in my hometown."

The central government stipulated in a law that it will permanently dispose of the tainted soil outside Fukushima Prefecture within 30 years, but she is suspicious about whether the government will actually do so. Four years have passed since the outbreak of the nuclear crisis. "While thinking it necessary to accept changes taking place in the town as it gets damaged, I can't sort out my feelings," she added.

Meanwhile, an official of the government of Naraha in Fukushima Prefecture said, "The fact that it was delivered has significant meaning." Naraha, whose entire town has been evacuated, is about to decide to return to where it was before the March 2011 triple disasters. A total of 570,000 cubic meters of contaminated soil is piled up in a temporary storage site in the town. A total of 1,000 cubic meters of contaminated soil, or only 0.2 percent of the soil, can be transferred from the site in the initial year. But the official said, "It will give reassurances to the townspeople. We want to appreciate the Okuma and Futaba towns for deciding to accept it."

Etsuko Yoshida, 76, who has lived in a temporary housing unit in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Koriyama after evacuating from Kawauchi in the same prefecture, says there is a temporary storage site for contaminated soil in front of her house in an "emergency evacuation preparation zone." She said, "I have mixed feelings when I come to think of the people of Okuma and Futaba who are losing their hometowns. The government should safely transport all of the contaminated soil in the prefecture to a facility rather than loosely saying, 'We have just started to deliver it for now'."

March 14, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Keeping the town in shape for scattered residents

Retired town officials work on road maintenance in nuclear no-go zone



A worker of the Okuma Municipal Government branch office feeds a group of swans at Kumagawa River that flows through Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture. (Mainichi)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150314p2a00m0na006000c.html>

OKUMA, Fukushima -- **A group of retired town officials here are working to keep this evacuated town in shape for local residents who have been forced to scatter across the country in the wake of 2011 Fukushima nuclear crisis.**

The delivery of radioactively contaminated soil generated from decontamination work around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant to an interim storage facility in Okuma began on March 13. At the mouth of the Kumagawa River in the town, about 1.5 kilometers south of the storage site, a group of swans were seen resting before they fly back north. When an Okuma Municipal Government worker dressed in protective gear approached, the birds swam closer to him to get food.

Six retired senior officials of the Okuma Municipal Government volunteered to work when a branch office opened in April 2013. **As a buffer zone is planned on the northern coastal side to isolate the storage facility from the shore, the branch office workers are requesting the municipal government to take natural conservation measures for the swans and salmon coming to the area.**

The retired officials work on road maintenance and other tasks to keep their hometown looking good, although 96 percent of residential areas in the town have been designated as a difficult-to-return zone.

"I want people outside the town to think about the feelings of Okuma residents who decided to accept the storage facility in their hometown, by imagining as if this was their own hometown as well," said Tsunemitsu Yokoyama, 62, former chief of the town's disaster recovery section.

Return of elderly

March 15, 2015

Return of Fukushima elderly gives preview of future

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/15/national/return-of-fukushima-elderly-gives-preview-of-future/#.VQV9LOF1Cot>

by Yuriy Humber and Emi Urabe

Bloomberg

The nation honored its dead last week from the earthquake and tsunami that devastated Tohoku's Pacific coastline on March 11 four years ago.

For those who have spent those years helping survivors in Tohoku, the experience has thrown up the challenge of **how to knit back together communities built over centuries, then shattered in the space of minutes on that Friday afternoon in 2011.**

Doctors and others say the work in Tohoku has also offered a fast-forward glimpse into Japan's own future and perhaps what awaits other industrialized societies trying to understand how communities will function as their youth populations are slowly eclipsed by the elderly.

The rural northeast coast was already losing many of its young people to jobs in Tokyo and other cities. That trend accelerated after the offshore quake and subsequent waves killed 15,891 people. A further 2,584 are still listed as missing, according to the tally released by the National Police Agency on Tuesday. The population drain has been especially acute in Fukushima Prefecture, where the tsunami generated by the 9.0-magnitude quake slammed into Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s nuclear plant, giving the world its first triple reactor meltdown.

On average, the Pacific coast has been hit by major tsunami about once every 400 years. Each time, the communities rebuilt the towns and roads. This time, they have to contend with nuclear fallout.

Radioactive plumes thrown into the air from the disaster showered down on the sea and nearby villages. The town of Naraha — known for its salmon runs, persimmon orchards and cattle-grazing grasslands — is one of them.

Written records of the town, whose name means Oak Leaf, stretch back more than 1,000 years. Naraha, 13 km south of the wrecked reactors and host to another nuclear plant, is the home of Kaneko Takahara, a petite 66-year-old who was evacuated four years ago along with the town's more than 7,400 residents. After years of clearing radioactive rubble and waste, the government aims to reopen Naraha this spring. On a recent winter morning, Takahara is in a black cardigan and dark slacks, bustling with the energy of a person half her age and beaming a pretty much permanent smile as she talks of going home.

"I want to send a message that we're full of life," she said. "There's no use crying over the past."

Yet, surveys of evacuated residents show the majority of those ready to return are retired and elderly.

Among those in their 30s and 40s, only 3 percent plan to go back.

"This is Japan in 20 years," said Tetsuya Ohira, a doctor and professor at the Fukushima Medical University, referring to the town as a microcosm of the nation's shifting demographics, marked by a falling birthrate and rapidly graying population.

How Naraha functions will be a testing ground for other regions in Japan and aging societies elsewhere, according to Ohira.

“The issue of how to deal with health problems is the same as what we’ll face nationwide,” Ohira said after giving a nutrition seminar last month at a temporary housing complex for Naraha evacuees in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture. “We are starting to resolve them now.”

As Ohira’s two dozen elderly listeners prepare for calisthenics, the doctor offers an assessment of this possible future. It isn’t pretty.

Besides higher health costs from increased rates of heart disease and diabetes, fewer older people live with their children, and societal isolation brings on depression, he said.

Since the quake, the fragmentation of traditional communities has led to more people living by themselves. At least 145 people have died alone in temporary housing since the disasters, according to the Yomiuri Shimbun, a major daily that tallied police data acquired across several prefectures.

About 120,000 people, or 6 percent of the population of Fukushima, are still classed as evacuees, according to data from the government’s Reconstruction Agency. A further 110,000 evacuees live in the prefectures of Miyagi and Iwate to the north.

Naraha’s neighboring town of Futaba, which co-hosts the nuclear plant, had about 7,000 residents before the quake.

When the evacuation orders came, about 1,200 of them began a gypsy-like journey on a caravan of buses almost 200 km south to Saitama Prefecture.

There they took refuge, first in the Saitama Super Arena sports stadium, before moving into an abandoned high school. At one point, as many as 1,400 people lived there in classrooms, an official at Futaba Town Hall said in an interview.

The high school also served as the town office until June 2013 as the mayor who led the exodus, Katsutaka Idogawa, tried to keep the community bonded. The last of the residents left the school in December 2013. Now Futaba’s population is broken into pieces and scattered across the country. Some former residents moved to snow-swept Hokkaido, others to tropical Okinawa. About 2,000 live closer by in Iwaki, where another temporary town hall for Futaba has been set up.

With so many communities splintered, the question for U.S.-based Japanese architect Emi Kiyota was how to create areas to bring people back together.

She set up a project called iBasho Cafe, a reference to the Japanese word for place, and built a center for retirees that they run themselves in Ofunato, Iwate Prefecture.

The center operates as a cafe as well as an organic farm. Kiyota said it reflects the ideas of the elderly she spoke with, who said they wanted to contribute and not be a burden.

Centers like iBasho show another social model. They motivate the elderly to go out and interact with other sections of society that might need support, Kiyota said.

“Having a social infrastructure is more important than physical infrastructure and buildings,” she said.

Yutaka Ono, a doctor who heads the National Center for Cognitive Behavior Therapy and Research, has been attempting similar community-forging exercises in Tohoku to combat the rise in depression, suicide, alcohol abuse and other ills that affect post-disaster areas.

“You need a hub, a place where people can get together and do activities,” Ono said. “If you can get people together and talk, that lightens the load.”

All the disaster-hit regions of northern Japan need help to regain self-belief and a sense of pride, said Tomohiro Takei, a venture capitalist who put his career on hold to create a network called Makoto for entrepreneurs in the region.

Tohoku has all the land and human resources it needs to succeed, Takei said on the sidelines of the Sendai for Start-Ups! forum he helped organize last month.

“The biggest thing we have to change is confidence,” Takei said, noting that in the second year of running the forum the number of attendees doubled to about 700.

The ever-smiling Kaneko Takahara from Naraha recognized that. After the evacuation, she threw herself into making craft items, such as traditional hanging mobiles used in interior decoration.

She’s organized three craft exhibitions produced by her and other ladies from the town, raising more than \$4,000. More important than the money, the activity has given women from Naraha who lost loved ones in the tsunami a physical task to ease the mental suffering, Takahara said.

She’s also maintained the town’s traditional annual Taiko drum performance, pulling together members of the Naraha troupe from all over the country to rehearse and perform.

That idea came partly because a distraught mother of a young Taiko team member called her months after the evacuation to say the boy was crying in the bath because he was afraid he’d forget how to drum.

As emotional as the reunions have been, she knows that most of the younger Naraha residents will not return. She also knows that as long as she is physically able to, she will.

“If I couldn’t go back at all, if there was no choice, that would be easier,” said Takahara, who is a widow with three children. “I’d feel a burden eased. But I must return.”

The grandmother said she, along with her generation, bears part of the responsibility for accepting the construction of the Fukushima nuclear power plant and must now live with its consequences.

Back in Naraha, the community will be able to enjoy hobbies such as sewing and making crafts in their large gardens, instead of being cooped up in temporary homes, she said.

“That’s fun for older folk,” she said. “But, it will be sad not to have the grandkids around.” She just hopes they can visit.

“We’re old, but come join us if you want and let’s have a good time together.”

Decommissioning: Both sides of the coin

March 18, 2015

Mothballing nuclear reactors a mixed blessing for local communities

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201503180050>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Having lived for decades in close proximity to nuclear reactors that brought a windfall of benefits, local host communities reacted with mixed feelings to decisions to decommission a handful of aging facilities. Mihama in Fukui Prefecture learned on March 17 that Kansai Electric Power Co. had decided to mothball the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors of the Mihama nuclear power plant because they had reached the end of their service life.

The town, with a population of 10,000, **reaped huge tax grants from the central government over the years as compensation for hosting the facility.**

Shizuo Shoyama, 62, lives about a kilometer away from the Mihama plant.

"I really don't want the company to simply say 'With decommissioning, this means goodbye,'" he said.

Shoyama spent around 40 years doing repair and maintenance work at the plant until he retired two years ago. The company he worked for has close ties to Kansai Electric Power.

Construction on the No. 1 reactor began when Shoyama was attending junior high school. Looking back on that period, he said there was a proliferation of small inns where workers stayed, as well as a sharp increase in tourists to the region.

"I hope Kansai Electric Power will think about what can be done for the future economic development of our community, with which it has enjoyed such a long period of co-existence and co-prosperity," Shoyama said.

Others in Mihama hope the decommissioning will serve as a catalyst to move away more fully from a dependence on nuclear power generation.

Teruyuki Matsushita, a former member of the Mihama town assembly who now operates a nature facility, said the decommissioning presented an opportunity to develop the local economy so the community does not have to depend on nuclear energy.

In this regard, Matsushita, 66, said local farm produce and seafood should be more fully utilized. He began supplying local produce to an "izakaya" bar chain in Tokyo from 2014.

"If we had a strong local industry, there would have been no need to accept nuclear plants and live with the dangers they pose," he said. "It's time to devote our efforts to community building once again."

The mayor of Mihama, Jitaro Yamaguchi, met March 17 with Hideki Toyomatsu, an executive vice president at Kansai Electric Power, to ask for the company's continued assistance in providing local employment.

The city of Tsuruga in Fukui Prefecture, where the No. 1 reactor at the Tsuruga plant operated by Japan Atomic Power Co. will be decommissioned, also is heavily dependent on nuclear plants for its economic well-being.

Akiko Otani, 72, operates a hotel in Tsuruga, and is concerned that the community will face a serious decline as the population decreases.

When Japan Atomic Power submitted applications in 2004 for the construction of the No. 3 and No. 4 reactors at the Tsuruga plant, Otani negotiated a loan of 140 million yen (\$1.2 million) to construct a hotel annex. However, reactor construction was put on hold after the 2011 disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

"**The nuclear plant is our lifeline,**" she said. "I pray that the company will build something that will provide employment to many people."

Local companies that relied on sales to the Tsuruga plant are now looking for new markets on the assumption the facility will be out of operation for a long period or decommissioned.

For example, the Kiko group, which sells machinery and tools, depended on nuclear plants for about 60 percent of its sales until the triple meltdown at the Fukushima facility.

After the nuclear accident, company chairman Hidemune Komori, 67, decided to review that dependence on nuclear plant-related sales and set up a subsidiary in Vietnam, which is buying Japanese nuclear technology, as part of a plan to increase sales to foreign companies.

"Our company management will be thrown into disarray unless we develop more options," he said.

In Saga Prefecture, the news of the decommissioning decisions was generally welcomed.

Hideo Kishimoto, the mayor of Genkai, which hosts the Genkai nuclear plant, said: "It is the right decision. I will ask Kyushu Electric Power to ensure the decommissioning work is carried out in a safe and thorough manner once it gets under way."

Kyushu Electric Power decided on March 18 to decommission the No. 1 reactor at the Genkai plant. Yoshikazu Tsukabe, the mayor of Imari, Saga Prefecture, had called for consultations with neighboring municipalities before any decision is made on resuming operations at nuclear plants. Imari lies within a 30-kilometer radius of the Genkai plant.

In a statement welcoming the decommissioning decision, Tsukabe noted that aging reactors pose a higher risk of accidents.

Saga Governor Yoshinori Yamaguchi weighed in by saying, "It is the thinking of the prefectural government as well as my own opinion that dependence on nuclear energy should fundamentally be lowered as much as possible."

He said **the decommissioning decision will help reduce Saga Prefecture's dependence on nuclear energy.**

Fukushima and depopulation

March 19, 2015

POINT OF VIEW/ Yuko Endo: 4 years from nuclear disaster, Fukushima needs to reverse depopulation

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/opinion/AJ201503190009>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The village of Kawauchi, where I serve as mayor, is located 20 to 30 kilometers southwest of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Radiation levels remained relatively low, so it was quite obvious what we had to do to allow residents to return. We attracted firms to secure workplaces, and we expanded the lineup of departments at our clinic so residents could live with peace of mind once they returned.

We also plan to open an intensive care home for the elderly and a shopping complex by year-end.

Of the 3,000 or so people who lived in Kawauchi before the nuclear disaster, some 1,600 have so far returned. Only 20 percent of those aged 40 or under are back in Kawauchi.

Families are no longer the same as before. As they have had to live in evacuation, such as in temporary housing, the number of households has increased from the pre-disaster figures of 1,100 to 1,500.

Young villagers have landed jobs in urban areas, where they took shelter. Children have also gotten used to schools to which they were transferred. Those people are building new lives for themselves, although we call them "evacuees."

They have come to think of returning to their own homes as something like a "resettlement" because a return to Kawauchi would require them to once again drastically alter their living environment.

I think it is no longer possible to restore the village to what it was. There is nothing wrong with people's decisions to settle elsewhere in a forward-looking mindset, instead of returning to Kawauchi. In fact, continuing on with an "all-temporary" life--a temporary job and a temporary school--would be akin to wasting precious time in your life.

The central government has set aside 25 trillion yen (\$208 billion) to spend on rebuilding efforts from the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster during a five-year “intensive reconstruction period.” That period will expire at the end of fiscal 2015.

The central government intends to show the world how Fukushima has been rebuilt, hopefully when the Summer Olympics are held in Tokyo in 2020.

I think it is, of course, essential to designate a deadline in setting a goal, but I don’t want it to be forgotten that it takes a long time to rebuild a disaster-hit area.

Forests, which account for 87 percent of Kawauchi’s landmass, have yet to be decontaminated. All we can do is wait for the natural decay of radioactive substances while taking care of the forests, but that will probably take us something like 40 years, the same time frame for having the nuclear reactors decommissioned.

I am concerned that when the “deadline” has passed, the central government could reduce its assistance in the name of efficiency across the entire area of Futaba county (a broader administrative district that includes Kawauchi), which hosts the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Rebuilding measures are, of course, essential, but rather, how to cope with an ongoing depopulation is, in fact, presenting an extremely crucial issue. Kawauchi’s current population of 1,600 had initially been projected for some time around 2030. But the nuclear disaster has abruptly turned that projection into a reality.

Other constituent towns and villages of Futaba county, where a return of residents will get under way from now on, will also have to face the same challenge. Without young people, it remains difficult to manage a local government and envisage a future for a local community, no matter how magnificent the infrastructure to be built under reconstruction measures.

I realize that exactly represents the serious nature of the nuclear disaster.

While it is never easy to try to stop depopulation, an anxiety about not knowing how we could cope with the drastic change we are now facing is giving the villagers a sense of loss and helplessness, which is working against their return.

I want the central government to offer tax incentives and other measures so people will feel they would be better off working in the countryside than doing so in an urban area.

If the central government says it cares about provincial communities and wants to revitalize their economies, why not decentralize the organizations and human resources of the national government, which are centered in Tokyo, to rural areas? Young people will never join depopulated communities from the outside unless there are policy incentives such as those.

Unlike in natural disasters, it is obvious to see who are responsible for and who were victimized by the nuclear disaster. That situation, in my view, is preventing disaster-hit communities from standing on their own feet and is making them unhappy in the end.

Damage should be repaired properly, but thinking of yourself forever as a victim will probably not allow you to proceed to the next stage of the rebuilding process, whereby you should build a new community on your own.

The rice-planting area in Kawauchi rebounded to about 160 hectares last year, half as large as pre-disaster levels. That is because so many farmers find joy and take pride in farming in the village. In the part of Kawauchi where evacuation orders were lifted in October, young farmers are trying to grow gentians, which they hope to turn into a new special product.

I feel so reassured to learn that some of our residents are showing their mettle at a time when the overall population is increasingly relying on administrative services.

It is not cash but human resources that have the potential to change a local community.

Rebuilding Kawauchi could also help assist those who have left our village. They do need a home community to which they could return whenever they wish to. That would require persevering efforts, but we cannot afford to give up on them.

* * *

Born in 1955, Yuko Endo, mayor of Kawauchi since 2004, previously served on the village assembly there. While almost all residents of Kawauchi evacuated following the Fukushima nuclear disaster of March 2011, Endo issued a message to them in January 2012, in which he called on those who could to return to the village.

(This article is based on an interview by Susumu Okamoto.)

New committees to enhance preparedness

March 21, 2015

Japan's Cabinet Office to review evacuation plans

Mar. 21, 2015 - Updated 13:45 UTC+1

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

The Japanese government plans to launch new committees in municipalities near nuclear plants to enhance preparedness for a nuclear accident.

The committees will be made up of officials from local governments and relevant central government offices.

Until now, the Cabinet Office, which is in charge of nuclear emergency preparations, has assigned a working group of local and central government officials to each of 13 areas across the country that has at least one nuclear power plant.

The groups have helped local governments within a 30-kilometer radius of the plants draw evacuation plans in the event of an accident.

But there are **concerns about whether the plans would be effective in the event of multiple disasters involving an earthquake and tsunami.**

To improve the effectiveness of the plans, the Cabinet Office decided to **replace the working groups with new committees that consist of deputy prefectural governors and senior officials of central government offices.**

The committee members will be tasked with improving local evacuation plans by reviewing evacuation drills carried out by the relevant prefectures.

They will evaluate the drills based on guidelines issued by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Train service returning to normal

March 21, 2015

Train service resumes on final stretch of JR line in disaster-hit Miyagi town

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201503210046>

By HIRONORI KATO/ Staff Writer

ONAGAWA, Miyagi Prefecture--**After a four-year wait, trains are up and running the full length of the restored JR Ishinomaki Line, which was ravaged by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster.**

The first train left Onagawa Station at 6:12 a.m. on March 21. The first incoming train arrived at 7:30 a.m., greeted by a throng of residents waving flags used to celebrate large catches by fishing boats.

The entire line extends 44.7 kilometers through Miyagi Prefecture, eastward from Kogota Station in Misato to Onagawa Station via Ishinomaki Station in Ishinomaki.

The 2.3-km stretch through the last two stations of Urashuku and Onagawa had remained unconnected after tsunami up to 20 meters high swept the tracks away.

Major facilities, including the Onagawa station building and town government office, as well as 70 percent of all households, were destroyed, and 827 people, accounting for 8 percent of the town's population, perished.

Though all services on the line were halted due to the disaster, the line's operator, East Japan Railway Co. (JR East), partially restarted operations in April 2011.

Service on the rest of the line resumed in March 2013, with the exception of the final two stops.

Urashuku and Onagawa stations were reopened to passengers after the completion of work to elevate land in the town in case of a future tsunami. The downtown area where the latter station is located was raised by as much as 15 meters in some areas.

The station's new building, which was designed to resemble the silhouette of a black-tailed gull spreading its wings, cost 850 million yen (\$7 million) to build.

With service now available on the entire line, trains will be making a total of 11 runs a day.

Only 45 items left on food list to be checked for cesium

March 21, 2015

Food list for cesium tests to be shortened: ministry

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/21/national/food-list-cesium-tests-shortened-ministry/#.VQ1qjeF1Cos>

KYODO

The health ministry plans to shorten the list of food being tested for cesium fallout from the Fukushima nuclear disaster as the number of tainted items is falling.

Based on test results so far, **the ministry will exclude 20 items including broccoli, plums and tea, starting in April. That will reduce the number of test items to 45**, a list released Friday showed.

But **beef and milk** will continue to be tested, given that the degree of cesium contamination in those foods depends heavily on how cattle were raised and what they were fed.

The tests are conducted in 17 prefectures, mainly in the Tohoku and Kanto regions, to allay public health concerns triggered by the massive radioactive debris released into the air and sea by the March 2011 triple core meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant, which is **still polluting the Pacific Ocean with radioactive water**.

Life not easy for Fukushima pupils

March 24, 2015

Meet the 12-year-old Fukushima girl who is braving it alone at school

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201503240014>

By SUSUMU OKAMOTO/ Staff Writer

KAWAUCHI, Fukushima Prefecture--For the past three years, all Chika Akimoto wanted to do was to hang out with kids of her age at school.

But that didn't happen. Instead, she was the sole pupil at Kawauchi Elementary School here through the fourth to sixth grades.

On March 23, the 12-year-old graduated to move on to the next stage in her education.

She will be attending Kawauchi Junior High School from April, but that, too, will be a lonely experience as she will be the only first-year student there.

This village had a population of around 3,000 people prior to the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011. Everybody evacuated, and relatively few residents returned.

In her farewell message at the graduation ceremony, Chika said, "Believing that all of my classmates will return, I spent my school life in a classroom which was far too big for a single student."

The school, the only one at elementary level in Kawauchi, had 29 pupils and 15 staff members, including teachers, in this school year.

After the nuclear accident, Chika evacuated with her grandparents, parents and a brother who is three years older than her. The family spent a year in Koriyama, which is about 40 kilometers away.

In January 2012, the village government declared it was safe to return and that the elementary school would resume classes the following April.

The announcement prompted Chika's family to return to their home. At the time, the youngster assumed she would pick up the threads of her pre-disaster existence and spend time catching up with her old classmates.

The reality could not have been more different. None of her 18 classmates came back.

Instead, she had one-on-one classes with her teacher. Even if she forgot her textbooks, there were no students she could turn to for help.

Satomi Senzaki, 38, was Chika's homeroom teacher in the fifth and sixth grades.

"If there are 19 students, they can relax their minds appropriately during classes," Senzaki recalled thinking. "But with only one student, she was bound to snap one day."

When Chika was in fifth grade, Senzaki told her in the second school term, "Chika, let's stop doing our best."

Senzaki began to chat with her about anime, the atmosphere of the teachers' common room and other topics.

One day, Chika told Senzaki: "My mother told me a very cruel thing. She said, 'Give up thinking that your friends will return (to this village).'"

Senzaki replied: "No parent could possibly think a classroom with only one student is a good thing. You should not continue to hope for your friends' return. You should enjoy yourself now. That was what your mother was thinking."

As a sixth-grader, Chika made welcome speeches whenever inspection groups visited the school.

In the school athletic meet, she made a declaration as the representative of the other children. She also served as the leader of the cheering squad and the conductor of the drum and fife band. She encouraged younger pupils who were poor at playing drums.

In a school event last October, all the pupils showed their study-related works. Chika created the kanji character "kizuna" (bond) with photos of smiling faces of about 100 people, including Kawauchi villagers, that she herself had taken.

In announcing the work, she said: "Three years ago, I was separated from my friends." Then, she started to weep uncontrollably.

"She should weep more. She was making so much effort," Senzaki said.

At the graduation ceremony, Chika's farewell message echoed across the gymnasium.

"I was asked by Ms. Satomi (Senzaki), 'Which do you like, a classroom that has many students or a classroom that has only one student?' My answer was 'A classroom that has many students is good. But a classroom that has only one student is not bad.' I like Ms. Satomi very much.

"Though I was the only student, I was not alone. Though I was lonely, I was not pitiful. ... Having self-confidence and pride and holding onto my dreams, I am moving on to a brighter future."

Kawauchi Junior High School, like Chika's elementary school, is the only one of its kind in the village. For the next 12 months or so, Chika faces the prospect of being a solitary student again.

The total number of students at the school will be 13. Chika said she plans to cut her long hair and join the badminton club.

March 23, 2015

Two students become first to graduate from Fukushima school since nuclear crisis began

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/23/national/two-students-become-first-graduate-fukushima-school-since-nuclear-crisis-began/#.VRAL9uF1Cos>

Kyodo

FUKUSHIMA – A public elementary school formerly located in the exclusion zone near the Fukushima No. 1 power plant held its first graduation ceremony on Monday since the nuclear crisis began in March 2011. Two graduating students attended the ceremony with teachers and current students at a temporary school building in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, becoming the first to graduate from Futaba Kita Elementary School in roughly four years.

“I feel full of gratitude,” said 12-year-old Haruka Nomura, one of the graduating pupils, after receiving her graduation certificate.

She added that she wishes she could have spent more time at the school.

The school, along with Futaba Minami Elementary School, were located in Futaba, which hosts the crippled nuclear plant. The two schools were closed for about three years after the onset of the nuclear crisis forced the town to evacuate.

Around 340 children went to the two schools before the crisis. They resumed classes together in Iwaki in April of last year with only six students.

Most of the children from Futaba have moved to schools in the places where their families now live following the evacuation order.

On Monday, all other public elementary schools in Fukushima Prefecture held graduation ceremonies, including Kawauchi Elementary School in the village of Kawauchi, which had only one sixth-grader.

All residents of that village were forced to evacuate amid the nuclear crisis. Although the evacuation order there was lifted in January 2012, only 29 students have returned to the school, which hosted 114 students before the crisis.

Chika Akimoto, the lone sixth-grader, spent her last years of elementary school alone with her homeroom teacher in a large classroom.

“Sometimes, I felt lonely because my friends didn’t come back,” Akimoto said.

But she made friends with younger students and grew to be the student leader at the school, taking responsibilities and caring for other students, according to her homeroom teacher, Satomi Senzaki, who taught Akimoto in the fifth and sixth grades.

“I was not alone. I felt lonely at times, but I never felt pitiful,” Akimoto said at the graduation ceremony.

“My school life has been full of smiles.”

Anime museum in Fukushima

March 29, 2015

'Evangelion' producer hopes anime museum will put world spotlight on rural Fukushima

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/cool_japan/fun_spots/AJ201503290027

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

MIHARU, Fukushima Prefecture--In a twist for anime fans, the production company of "Neon Genesis Evangelion" is coming to the assistance of a rural area recovering from the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster with a new museum and studio here.

The opening event for the anime museum was held here on March 28 by a subsidiary of Gainax Co., which established the facility to convey anime from Fukushima Prefecture to the world. Attendees got a glimpse of the anime production process and original drawings in the museum, which the company hopes to draw about 30,000 visitors annually.

"By releasing our works from here to the world, I want people (around the world) to know the good points of Fukushima Prefecture and Japan," said Fukushima Gainax President Yoshinori Asao, who is originally from the city of Fukushima.

The facility is named, "**Kuso to Art no Museum--Fukushima Sakura Yugakusha**" (Museum of fantasy and art--Fukushima Sakura Yugakusha).

It was built on the site of the former Sakura Junior High School, which was closed in fiscal 2012 due to the dwindling number of pupils. "Yugakusha" literally means "a place for playing and learning."

The museum will officially open on April 1. The anime studio will also be set up on the same site in June, where employees of Fukushima Gainax will produce anime.

AKB48 still visits devastated areas

March 26, 2015

AKB48 members continue to bring smiles to disaster-hit areas despite initial criticism

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201503260011>



AKB48 members perform at a concert in Kamaishi, Iwate Prefecture, on March 11, the fourth anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. (Naoko Kawamura)

By TAKANORI TSUJI/ Staff Writer

Four years after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, the number of entertainers visiting the devastated areas is declining.

However, members of the popular girls idol group AKB48 are continuing to make the long trek from their home base in Tokyo's Akihabara district.

On the Internet, many favorable messages have been posted such as, "There is criticism (of AKB48's activities in disaster areas). But it is a fact that the group is continuing to bring smiles."

On March 11, which marked the fourth anniversary of the disaster, AKB48 members made their 47th visit to the disaster-affected areas.

During the tour, the group's leader, Minami Takahashi, 23, said, "Though our ability to help may be small, we will continue to support the affected areas."

On that day, AKB48 members held live concerts in six locations in the three heavily impacted prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima. One of the six venues was in Kamaishi, Iwate Prefecture, where about 900 people were killed by the tsunami.

After the conclusion of a memorial ceremony, eight members of the group appeared on stage in a shopping center at 5 p.m. They included not only Takahashi but also Nanami Sato, 15, whose hometown is in Iwate Prefecture.

"We will never forget this day," Takahashi told the crowd. "We are happy if we can convey our smiles to you."

Then, the members began to sing one of their hits, "Heavy Rotation." About 1,000 spectators let out a big cheer. Some children began to dance, while some elderly people began to clap their hands, albeit clumsily.

From 6 p.m., the concert was aired live in theaters in Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya and Fukuoka. The spectators there joined in when AKB48 members in Kamaishi started to sing “Tenohira ga Katarukoto” (What our palms speak to us), the group’s song to support the reconstruction of affected areas.

Momona Yahata, 13, a first-year student of Kamaishi Junior High School, who was one of the spectators in Kamaishi, said, “I was able to get much energy (from the group).”

Four years ago, members of AKB48 were also affected by the disaster. Their concerts, held daily at a theater in Akihabara dedicated exclusively to the group, were suspended for about two weeks. TV programs in which they were scheduled to appear were replaced by other programs.

Immediately following the disaster, AKB48 announced that it would launch the “Dareka no Tameni Project” (Project for someone), with part of the proceeds from the sales of their music CDs being donated to disaster victims.

On May 22, 2011, members of the group began to hold live concerts in affected areas.

However, critical messages were posted on the Internet. One asked, “Is it meaningful for members of an idol group to go to affected areas?” Another said, “They are just putting on a performance for show immediately after the disaster.”

On one occasion, the group planned to hold a concert at a corner of a school playground where temporary housing facilities are sited for evacuees. However, it was not able to secure the venue. So members used a truck as a mobile stage.

The group did not publicize the concert in advance except to residents around the school, so that many fans would not come there.

“We were half in doubt about whether the group would really come here,” said a teacher of the junior high school in Miyagi Prefecture.

When the group tried to use a school in a coastal area of Iwate Prefecture as a concert venue, the school declined, saying, “The mental care of children is important.”

Members of AKB48 also had conflicts in their minds. Initially, Takahashi had fears about seeing the devastation in the impacted areas. She also thought that there would be nothing AKB48 members could do.

However, Yasushi Akimoto, 56, AKB48 producer, encouraged them, saying, “Doing something is better than doing nothing.”

When Takahashi was talking about the status of affected areas in an event in the Kanto region in February 2012, some audience members made noise. She chided them, saying, “What occurred on March 11 is something that could happen to us. Please think seriously about it.”

Yura Sanouchi, 15, who graduated this month from Ogatsu Junior High School in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, clearly remembers AKB48 members visiting the area about three years ago.

“Though four years have passed since the disaster, they have yet to forget us (people in affected areas),” she said.

Safety of Japanese food

March 29, 2015

Japan to play up safety of food products at expo in Milan

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/29/national/japan-play-safety-food-products-expo-milan/#.VRg7feHwmos>

JJI

The government will use Expo Milano 2015 in Italy to highlight the safety of Japanese food products, including those from Fukushima Prefecture, according to its official representative Tatsuya Kato.

"I want to use the expo as an opportunity to correct any wrong perceptions or information," Kato said in a recent interview, referring to the import bans imposed on Japanese food after the Fukushima nuclear crisis unfolded in March 2011.

Kato said some countries still require Japanese exporters to submit reports on the radiation checks or certificates of origin before accepting food products.

"The government should assist efforts for the lifting of such restrictions," he said. "We can brief key figures visiting the Japanese pavilion on how disaster areas have recovered and what measures have been implemented to ensure food safety."

Expo Milano 2015 will be held in Milan, Italy, from May 1 to Oct. 31. The theme of the event is "Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life."

Noting that the Japan Day reception in July, which will attract several hundred guests, will be an important opportunity to underscore the safety of Japan's food, Kato said Japan plans to hold a briefing and distribute leaflets at the reception.

Group to establish museum on Fukushima disaster

March 29, 2015

Group looks to set up Fukushima disaster recovery museum

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150329p2a00m0na005000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- A group of young locals is looking to establish a museum here that could pass on lessons and memories from the Great East Japan Earthquake and Fukushima nuclear disaster.

As an initial step, the group has planned an event for people to interact with Fukushima Prefecture farmers on April 11. While regularly holding such events, the group intends to collect items for exhibition that will tell the stories of the disaster evacuees. They hope to put the items on permanent display at the museum.

The group was formed by Kenta Sato, 33, who evacuated from Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture, to the city of Fukushima, and six others, including university students. They got to know each other through Fukushima disaster-related nonprofit work.

The idea for a Fukushima museum came after Sato guided a tour of the disaster-hit areas and realized how difficult it was to convey the feelings of local residents to tour participants in the limited time available.

"I want to create a place where people can really learn about the current situation of Fukushima Prefecture," he says.

In addition to exhibits, the museum would have a "learn-by-doing" section. For people from outside Fukushima Prefecture, the museum could serve as a starting point for learning about the disaster areas, while for prefectural residents it could serve as a way to learn about the current state of the disaster areas' recovery.

At the April 11 event at the "Channel Square" facility in the city of Fukushima, a game thought up by 29-year-old Chiemi Kamada, who was born in Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, and now lives in the prefecture city of Tamura, will be played. Called "One Bowl of Rice," the game involves the participants being handed cards with jobs, ages, and sexes written on them. The participants will role-play that person and give their thoughts about Fukushima Prefecture-grown rice. The game is aimed at making the participants imagine the feelings of people with a variety of viewpoints.

Kamada previously worked in Tokyo but returned to Fukushima Prefecture. While helping with the recovery efforts, she got to know a farmer who continued to grow good rice even after the disaster. She also met a mother who told her that even if Fukushima farmers meet the radiation standards for their crops, people may not buy them.

"In Japan, with its nuclear plants all over the country, anyone could end up in this kind of situation," she says.

It will not be easy for the group to set up the museum without financial assistance from the government or private sources. Sato is looking for wide-ranging support.

"I'd like to involve various people from inside and outside the prefecture, while thinking about how to stop the memories and lessons of the disaster from being lost, and what I can do as a Fukushima Prefecture resident," he said.

Government putting residents in danger



A young girl is checked for internal radiation exposure using the Baby Scan device in Minami-Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, in September 2014. (Asahi Shimbun file photo)

April 1, 2015

Fukushima residents suing government for lifting evacuation advisories

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201504010062>

By MASAKAZU HONDA/ Staff Writer

MINAMI-SOMA, Fukushima Prefecture--Hundreds of residents here plan to sue the central government for lifting evacuation advisories near the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant, **saying the decision endangered their lives because radiation levels remained high around their homes.**

In the lawsuit that will be filed with the Tokyo District Court, **the 535 plaintiffs from 132 households in the city just north of the nuclear plant will demand that the government retract its decision to lift the advisories and pay 100,000 yen (\$837) in compensation to each plaintiff.**

According to the plaintiffs, the government's cancellation of the advisories goes against the Law on Special Measures Concerning Nuclear Emergency Preparedness, which states that its purpose is to "protect the lives, bodies and properties of citizens from a nuclear disaster."

After the crisis started at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011, the government issued evacuation orders for areas within 20 kilometers of the plant. The plaintiffs' homes are in areas that were issued evacuation advisories and surrounding neighborhoods.

During the decontamination process for areas around the plant, the government initially wanted to lower annual radiation exposure doses to 1 millisievert. After that goal proved impossible, the target became 20 millisieverts.

"The government has selfishly raised the limit on annual public radiation exposure from 1 millisievert set before the nuclear crisis to 20 millisieverts, having residents return to their homes still exposed to high doses of radiation," said Kenji Fukuda, an attorney representing the plaintiffs. "This is an illegal act that violates the residents' right to a healthy environment guaranteed by the Constitution and international human rights laws."

A public relations official at the government's nuclear disaster response headquarters denied the government had put residents in danger.

"Annual radiation exposure levels in all areas that were previously issued the advisories have fallen below 20 millisieverts following decontamination procedures," the official said. "With the radiation levels unlikely to have a significant effect on the residents' health, we have called off the advisories by going through legal procedures."

The government issued the advisories to households starting in June 2011, urging pregnant women and children in particular to evacuate their homes.

The advisories, issued to 281 households in Fukushima Prefecture, were all lifted by the end of last year. But many of the 152 households that were issued advisories in Minami-Soma opposed the government's decision.

"The woodlands and farmlands of the surrounding areas are still contaminated, leaving many of the radiation levels unreduced," said Shuichi Kanno, the 74-year-old chief of a ward in Minami-Soma who heads the plaintiffs. "Radiation levels have even increased in some areas. There is no way our children and grandchildren will be returning to their homes like this."

The "10 lessons from Fukushima"

April 1, 2015

Fukushima crisis was a hard lesson but one vital to share, groups say

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/04/01/national/fukushima-crisis-hard-lesson-one-vital-share-groups-say/#.VRvtiuHwmos>

by Megan Rowling

Thomson Reuters Foundation

SENDAI – When professional boxer and model Tomomi Takano heard that children in Fukushima Prefecture were becoming unfit and overweight because the 2011 nuclear crisis limited the time they could play outside, she decided to use her skills to help.

Last month, the glamorous 27-year-old taught some 200 junior high school students in the village of Otama an indoor workout based on boxing moves.

"They really concentrated on the boxing and tried hard," she said at a recent U.N. conference hosted in Sendai about disaster risks. The boxer hopes to run more sessions in Fukushima to improve children's agility and provide an outlet for their emotions.

Takano and social activists in Sendai said they wanted to communicate to the world the human impacts of the crisis sparked when the huge 3/11 earthquake and tsunami caused nuclear reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 plant to experience three core meltdowns.

The nuclear disaster was a sensitive subject at the U.N. summit, where 187 governments adopted a new 15-year plan to reduce the risk of disasters around the world.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe made only passing reference to the nuclear catastrophe in his opening speech at the conference. But groups representing citizens affected by the crisis acknowledged in Sendai that tentative progress was being made.

Masaaki Ohashi, co-chair of JCC2015, a coalition of humanitarian nongovernmental organizations formed ahead of the summit, praised the new Sendai disaster mitigation framework for stating clearly that it applies to man-made and technological hazards, which cover nuclear power, as well as natural hazards.

He and others also noted the importance of an official presentation made at the conference about the lessons learned from the Fukushima crisis.

“The Japanese government, represented by the Cabinet Office, has clearly indicated that they are breaking away from the ‘safety’ myth around nuclear power plants, so we’re seeing a step forward,” said Takeshi Komino, general secretary of the aid agency CWS Japan.

At a session on technological hazards, which also covered the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, Tetsuya Yamamoto, deputy director general of Japan’s Nuclear Disaster Management Bureau, said the government was strengthening plans both to prevent and to respond to nuclear emergencies.

“Our preparedness (for Fukushima) was totally inefficient; we assumed the incident would affect a 10-km radius from the plant, but it was more than 30 km,” he said.

The operation to evacuate people living in the danger zone was confused and not enough support was provided, he said. Failings meant that some hospital patients died at evacuation centers, he noted.

A disaster prevention and evacuation plan has since been drawn up for 550,000 people, Yamamoto said. The government is continuing with its decontamination work and is monitoring people’s health in Fukushima, offering tests for thyroid cancer to those aged 18 and under, he added.

Civil society groups supporting Fukushima residents still struggling with the ongoing crisis released a booklet at the Sendai conference containing key lessons from the disaster. The “10 Lessons from Fukushima” is available in several languages including English.

It provides information on the effects of exposure to radiation, and how at-risk people can better protect their health, homes and livelihoods in the event of a nuclear crisis.

The booklet also describes how nuclear power was promoted through advertising and other methods by the Japanese government and Tokyo Electric Power Co. starting in the 1960s as a safe, clean form of energy that would benefit regional economies.

Komino of CWS Japan said it should be up to countries and communities to decide whether they want nuclear power, but added, “We are against the creation of the safety myth.

“Proactive risk identification and risk disclosure to the communities prior to the installation of such facilities is critical,” he emphasized.

Ohashi of JCC2015 said that, as the central government aims to export nuclear energy technology to developing countries, it bears a “producer’s responsibility” to share its knowledge about the risks and how to deal with them.

“Japan has the ability to help us to learn as an international community what some of the critical issues are,” said Marcus Oxley, executive director of the Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction (GNDR).

This is particularly important as climate change increases the pressure to move from fossil fuel use to alternative sources of energy, including nuclear power, he added.

Toshiyuki Takeuchi of the Fukushima Beacon for Global Citizens Network (FUKUDEN), a small organization that wrote much of the booklet launched in Sendai and led study tours of the affected areas, pointed to the need to adapt Japan's experience to different contexts.

For example, in countries that have shown interest in nuclear power, including Bangladesh and Thailand, it may be difficult for people to shut themselves inside concrete buildings in the event of a disaster. And in others, low literacy levels make written public education materials less useful than comic strip explanations.

Takeuchi questioned the legitimacy of suggesting that nuclear emergencies can really be prevented.

"Even if you can put risk-reduction measures in place, it would cost a ridiculous amount," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in Fukushima.

The "10 Lessons from Fukushima" booklet highlights the longer-term social and economic consequences of the crisis, including families splitting apart. It tells the story of a 29-year-old mother who decided to take her young daughter to live in a neighboring prefecture due to health fears, while her husband stayed behind to work.

Of the 160,000 people who left their homes after the nuclear disaster started, around 120,000 are still classified as evacuees. Some remain in cramped temporary accommodations, in prefabricated buildings erected in parks and other public land.

In places like Iwaki, south of the evacuation zone, the influx of displaced people seeking new homes and jobs has stirred resentment among residents, according to FUKUDEN.

Even though local-level officials have made preparations in efforts to revitalize evacuated towns and villages once they are decreed safe to return to, there is concern that only older generations will want to return, raising questions about their future viability.

"When you have these long-term persistent shocks . . . resilience starts to break down within a society," GNDR's Oxley said.

Both activists and United Nations officials said the memory of disasters must be preserved so that knowledge can be shared and used to improve protection.

"People are reluctant to talk about the nuclear issue . . . so gradually we are going to forget about it," said Ohashi of JCC2015.

Initiatives by Japanese groups, including their booklet, are aimed at ensuring "people know the reality" of a nuclear crisis, he said. **"Maybe Fukushima could become a mecca for (learning about) nuclear disasters in the future."**

Radiation and one's hometown

April 1, 2015 + books and films

Picture book about Fukushima nuclear crisis serves as education tool at schools

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150401p2a00m0na015000c.html>

A picture book has become a popular tool in classrooms in Japan to illustrate the loss and sorrow that people are facing in the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear crisis to help prevent memories of the disaster from fading.

The book, titled "Todoke minna no omoi: hoshano to furusato" (To reach you: radiation and one's hometown), portrays Myasa the cat as the protagonist that lives near the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. Myasa and its human family are forced to evacuate far from home in the wake of the nuclear meltdown, and the cat often thinks about its fellow animals such as cows, pigs and chickens that were left behind in radiation contaminated areas. Myasa promises to pass down stories about the nuclear disaster in hopes that such a tragedy is never repeated.

Mika Muraoka, the author of the book, hopes that the story of the feline will help readers think back on problems regarding the nuclear plant and its surrounding areas as people are beginning to lose interest in the issue.

Muraoka began writing children's books about life in 2007 after she lost her friend to suicide and traveled across the country to read her stories to children. She had visited a junior high school in the city of Fukushima six months before the nuclear meltdown and came to know students and their parents there. The author decided to write the Fukushima-themed book after hearing about hardships local residents faced while living as evacuees in the fear of radiation.

"I wanted this book to not pose questions over the pros and cons of nuclear power, but rather to be a story by which readers have a fresh look at the importance of their families and hometowns and think about what they can do (to protect them)," Muraoka said.

Muraoka wrote the feline story to have a positive message for the future, and the book was completed in February 2014. The drawings for the book were done by painter Akio Watanabe, 65, native to Miharu, Fukushima Prefecture. Also, an endorsement comment from actor Toshiyuki Nishida, 67, who was born in Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture, is included on the book band.

In a year since the book was released, elementary and junior high schools, as well as childcare centers in Hokkaido, Miyagi and Kagoshima prefectures that host nuclear power stations and also schools in other parts of the country, have introduced story reading time for children using Muraoka's picture book.

Muraoka herself continues to visit schools mainly in the Tokyo metropolitan area to read the book to children. She has traveled to schools in farther locations from her home in Tokyo, including Shizuoka and Kagawa prefectures to read the story.

The author has received various feedback from children, as well as teachers in emails and letters, such as, "I'll never forget the incident" and "I hope to protect my family and my hometown."

"The nuclear accident is something we all should remember. I would like not just children but also adults to read the book," Muraoka commented.

The picture book is published by Shin-Nihon Shuppan Sha and on sale at 1,500 yen (before tax).

April 01, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Onoda's video footage of Futaba



Collapsed houses remain in the town center of Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture, on Feb. 22. (Takeshi Teruya)

FOUR YEARS AFTER: For filmmaker, everything changed in Fukushima hometown

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201503060010>

March 06, 2015

By TAKESHI TERUYA/ Starff Writer

FUTABA, Fukushima Prefecture--Akira Onoda's video footage of his hometown runs 350 hours, but it does not contain a single shot of his favorite scene--the sunrise over the coastal village.

That is because residents can enter Futaba only 15 times a year and only between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m.

Futaba co-hosts the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, and four years after disaster struck the facility, most areas of Futaba remain largely off-limits to residents.

When he can, Onoda, a 24-year-old graduate student at Ibaraki University, uses his video camera to capture the deterioration of the uninhabited houses and infrastructure in Futaba.

He has also recorded interviews with about 150 Futaba evacuees at their new homes, from northern Miyagi Prefecture to southern Shimane Prefecture.

"There is a lot to be seen in the current Futaba aside from the footage recorded by the mass media," Onoda said.

Growing up in Futaba, Onoda only had good memories of the quiet and peaceful town. He once wanted to become a town official to serve the residents.

When he was a sophomore at college, the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami struck on March 11, 2011, triggering the nuclear accident that completely changed the sleepy rural town.

TV news coverage showed his desperate-looking acquaintances furiously criticizing Futaba officials and Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the plant, for bringing misery to the town.

Onoda felt he had lost Futaba.

During a soul-searching period in April 2012, he traveled to Britain on a study program.

But even on the far side of the planet, Onoda always thought of Fukushima. When he took part in a theater play with the nuclear disaster as the theme, an audience member asked him how his hometown has changed since the triple meltdown.

Upon his return to Japan in December that year, Onoda decided to record the conditions of his hometown and his interviews with Futaba evacuees. But the obstacles were high for the documentary production. All residents were forced to evacuate after the nuclear disaster started. Access is limited for most Futaba areas, which are still designated as “difficult-to-return zones,” with annual radiation doses of 50 millisieverts or more.

Onoda has also had a difficult time accepting the drastic changes in the characters of many of his acquaintances from the town.

One of his neighbors was known for his cheerful personality before the disaster. Onoda said he was surprised to see a new side of the neighbor that was full of resentment and bitterness toward TEPCO. Onoda also interviewed a neighbor whose son was killed in the tsunami, as well as TEPCO employees assigned to work in highly contaminated areas.

He has already created a 30-minute documentary from footage he recorded before November 2013. It has been shown at disaster-related events in Saitama and Tochigi prefectures.

Onoda plans to produce a sequel from materials he is currently shooting and give away the DVDs to evacuees from Futaba.

“I don’t believe that Futaba can become the peaceful place that it once was before the disaster anytime soon,” Onoda said. “For now, I only hope that it becomes a town that we can freely visit at any moment.”

The fading memory of disaster

March 30, 2015

COMMENTARY: Fukushima laments fading memories of nuclear disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/column/AJ201503300003>

By HIROSHI HOSHI/ Columnist

FUTABA, Fukushima Prefecture--A daily calendar pad on a living room wall in a private home in this northeastern community still showed the fateful date: “March 11, 2011.”

All of Futaba’s 7,000 or so residents left the town after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, which struck on that date, triggered a triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant it partially hosts. The residents remain evacuated because of high radiation levels.

I was accompanying Kazuo Sato, a 73-year-old evacuee, during a temporary return to his home in Futaba along with staffers of TV Asahi Corp.

Trees in his yard were found uprooted by wild boars. Rat droppings were seen littering his home floors. A wardrobe closet and a TV remained toppled.

Sato said he doesn't feel like making repairs to his dilapidated home, although he comes to visit it several times a year.

At any rate, the area in which his house stands has been designated a site for an interim storage facility, where radioactive soil and other debris, contaminated by fallout from the nuclear disaster, will eventually be collected. When he thinks about that, he almost feels flattened by the weight of reality, which dictates he will never be able to return to his former peaceful life, Sato said.

He said he was used to seeing his town ebullient with the construction and operation of the nuclear plant since he was in his 20s.

"I never imagined the nuclear plant, which brought liveliness to our town, could bare its teeth and turn on us this fiercely," Sato said with a sigh. "During the last four years, we have literally been trampled upon and kicked around"--a Japanese idiom for a string of misfortunes.

120,000 STILL EVACUATED

Sato fled to the nearby town of Kawamata immediately following the quake, with little more than the clothes on his back. He was unable to contact his son, then a 41-year-old post office worker, who was likely swept away by the tsunami. The son remains unaccounted for to this day.

That was the end of a joyful life for his family of six, comprising Sato and his wife, his son and his wife, and two grandchildren.

His son looks down at Sato and his wife from a photograph in a corner of a room in a temporary housing unit in the nearby city of Iwaki, where they have lived for three years.

"The winter cold is hard on me because the walls and the floors are so thin," Sato said. "We go shopping at a supermarket, but when we stock up on a lot of things, people view us temporary housing occupants as 'nuclear disaster upstarts' who are profiteering from compensation payments. That's also sad."

He added, "We have lost our home and our son and, as if that were not enough, our hometown is being turned into an accumulation site for radioactive soil. I just hope people will understand, if only a little, about how we feel."

The town government of Futaba has been relocated to Iwaki. Futaba residents currently remain evacuated in 39 prefectures across Japan, from Hokkaido to Okinawa, according to Shiro Izawa, the 56-year-old mayor of the town.

Izawa made what he described as a "heart-rending decision" in January when he agreed to accept an interim storage facility in Futaba following talks with the central and prefectural governments.

"I made that decision out of the belief that one community or another in Fukushima Prefecture has to take in the radioactive soil and other debris collected within the prefecture," he said. "A law has been enacted to the effect that the debris should be taken out of the prefecture for final disposal in 30 years or less. I will definitely make sure the central government keeps its word."

Izawa said he is being disquieted by the fading memory of the nuclear disaster.

"Some 120,000 residents of Fukushima Prefecture remain evacuated," the mayor said. "That reality is likely being left to oblivion, while nuclear power plants in other parts of Japan are moving toward restarts, even though host local governments remain underprepared for emergency evacuations."

It came to light recently that Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, kept the public in the dark about a long-running leak of radioactive water into the ocean outside the crippled plant. Izawa described that as a telltale sign of the way the memory of the disaster is fading away.

'FEMA' NEVER TOOK SHAPE

There are also disquieting signs in the Nagatacho political district of Tokyo.

During the early phase of the nuclear disaster four years ago, Japan's central government fell into a great confusion over which organization--the Self-Defense Forces, police or firefighters--should take the lead in dealing with the situation. Some politicians argued that a powerful organization should definitely be established to deal with emergencies.

That led ruling and opposition party members in the Upper House to approve a supplementary resolution when a decision was made in June 2012 to establish a new Nuclear Regulation Authority.

The resolution said the government should refer to the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency and other examples to fundamentally review its organization for dealing with large-scale disasters, including nuclear disasters, and should take necessary measures on the basis of the review.

In reality, however, the creation of a new organization for crisis management barely gained any traction, partly because of a turf war between government departments. Politicians today seldom speak about a Japanese version of FEMA, although another nuclear disaster could cause similar chaos to be repeated. That also illustrates the sad reality of the fading memory of the disaster.

Four Years After

A whole series of articles on Fukushima have been published in the past few weeks in the Asahi Shimbun. Some have been reprinted in this blog. The complete series can be found by clicking <http://ajw.asahi.com/tag/FOUR%20YEARS%20AFTER>

Suzuki's dream soon to be shattered

April 4, 2015

Fukushima couple take sentimental journey before their home vanishes

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201504040047>



Hisatomo Suzuki and his former colleagues at the Okuma town hall watch carp streamers flutter in the wind from Suzuki's home, shown in the right background, in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, on April 4. (Yosuke Fukudome)

By YOSHITAKA ITO/ Staff Writer

OKUMA, Fukushima Prefecture--Standing head to toe in protective gear, Hisatomo Suzuki gazes at the new carp streamers he hoisted outside his home.

Suzuki, 62, has long dreamed of the day he will look up at them alongside his grandchildren, just as other families do to celebrate the Boys Festival in May.

But Suzuki, a former senior official of the Okuma town government, will never be able to do that because his home is only 300 meters from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The house and the Japanese-style garden he has lovingly tended for so many years will soon be razed to make way for an interim storage facility for contaminated soil and other material generated from cleanup operations in Fukushima Prefecture. Up to 22 million cubic meters of waste will be stored for a maximum of 30 years.

"The landscape of our hometown will vanish," Suzuki said. "There is no way we can restore it."

He and his 58-year-old wife Kikuko visited their home on April 3 to take pictures of the wooden house and the carp banners for their grandchildren. The couple live in Koriyama, a city in the prefecture, after they were forced to evacuate because of the triple meltdown at the plant triggered by the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami disaster.

The town's 12,000 residents had to evacuate. Today, they are allowed to visit their homes just once a month, and only for several hours, due to hazardous radiation levels.

According to the family tree, Suzuki is the 19th descendant of his line that settled here.

Now, endless rows of tanks containing contaminated water from the plant stand in the neighborhood just north of his home as work to decommission the plant is in progress.

As the black, red and blue carp banners, measuring 3 to 5 meters, flutter in the wind, Suzuki takes a trip down memory lane as he watches them from the garden that was his pride and joy.

He used to awake early each morning and trim the garden shrubs meticulously, thinking of the day he would live together with his grandchildren at his home.

"I was looking forward to seeing them play in the garden," Suzuki said.

The couple's home has 11 rooms to enable them to live with the family of their son, Hirotomo, 32.

But his grandchildren, born after the disaster, have never been able to visit Suzuki's home in Okuma, which co-hosts the plant. Fuka is 3, and Harutomo is eight months old.

So Suzuki decided to take pictures of his home and garden with carp banners as a backdrop immediately after Harutomo was born.

Hirotomo supported his father's decision because he wants his children to know about the town where he grew up, even if only photographs can tell the story.

"I want to show them pictures of the town and explain to them fully how it looked and why we had to abandon the town," said Hirotomo, a company employee who lives in Aizu-Wakamatsu in the prefecture. Beyond the streamers stand forests of cedars and cypress, a landscape that has remained unchanged for hundreds of years and looks much the same as when Suzuki's ancestors lived here.

Although Suzuki has come to grips with the fact he can never return here to live, he said he still has a hard time accepting it.

"There's a nice wind blowing now and it's great," he said. "I wish I could have been here, holding my grandson and showing him the carp streamers. The wind is just the same as before (the nuclear disaster), though."

And then, Suzuki went on snapping pictures of the streamers.

Fukushima rice popular online

April 5, 2015

Fukushima rice kit enjoys online popularity

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150405p2a00m0na005000c.html>

A Fukushima rice kit developed by veteran copywriter Shigesato Itoi and a group of farmers in Fukushima Prefecture is becoming the talk of the town online.

Itoi, editor-in-chief of the website "Hobo Nikkan Itoi Shimbun" (Almost daily Itoi newspaper; <http://www.1101.com/home.html>), has joined forces with the "Aomushi Club" (green caterpillar club) led by rice farmer Hiroshi Fujita, 36, of Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture, to develop a kit called "Chiisa na Tanbo Kit" (small rice paddy kit) to grow the popular Koshihikari brand of rice from Fukushima rice seeds.

The kit went on sale on March 25 and is catching the fancy of a growing number of people, attracting comments on Twitter and other social networking services.

The kit comes with Koshihikari rice seeds that have cleared regulations for radioactive substances, along with fertilized sand, a planter and a manual. The purchasers of the kit will receive additional 3 kilograms of Fukushima rice at the time of harvest.

Itoi and his staff tried their hand at growing rice on the roof of a Tokyo building last year and posted the results online. "Sunshine and water will do the job," they say.

Fujita says it is natural to prioritize safety, and he and other developers want to convey the pleasure of growing rice. They have ensured the safety of their Fukushima rice. The Fukushima Prefectural Government checked about 10.75 million bags of rice harvested in 2014 and all of them showed readings below the national standard of 100 becquerels of radioactive substances per kilogram in the aftermath of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster.

Fujita says he would be happy if producers and consumers can share the same feeling as they watch the rice grow. The kits are being sold online at http://www.1101.com/store/little_tanbo/index.html but numbers are limited. The standard kit is priced at 7,560 yen.

April 05, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

24 hour-stay allowed in Nahara

April 6, 2015

Evacuees can stay 24 hours in Fukushima town

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150406_18.html

Apr. 6, 2015 - Updated 07:10 UTC+2

Residents of a town near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant can now stay in their homes 24 hours a day in preparation for the lifting of an evacuation order.

On Monday, the central government began to allow evacuees from Naraha Town in Fukushima Prefecture to stay in their homes at night as well as the day. **The measure will remain in effect for 3 months.**

After the 2011 accident at the plant, the government issued an evacuation order for most of the town. All of about 7,500 residents have been living away from their homes.

73-year-old Shigeru Yoshida and his 67-year-old wife Nobuko returned home from their temporary housing in Iwaki City, also in Fukushima. They brought in food, water and other daily necessities, and opened their windows to let in fresh air.

The government says it will decide when to lift the evacuation order after meeting with residents.

Many residents are voicing concerns about radiation. They also want the local infrastructure to be rebuilt.

Yoshida said he thinks the measure, which comes 4 years after the accident, indicates some progress. But he said the area has no medical institutions and few shops. He said he hopes government officials will

listen to residents' opinions on how the situation can be improved.

The officials say 182 of about 2,700 households in Naraha had applied for permission to stay as of Sunday.

New high school in Fukushima Pref.

April 8, 2015

New high school opens close to evacuation zone

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/04/08/national/new-high-school-opens-close-to-evacuation-zone/#.VSUOMZPwmos>

Kyodo

FUKUSHIMA – A new high school adjacent to the radiation exclusion zone in Fukushima Prefecture on Wednesday welcomed its first students, including many who fled the area as the 2011 nuclear disaster unfolded.

The prefecture-run Futaba Mirai Gakuen High School in the town Hirono has 152 students, of whom about 100 are from the wider Futaba district and who became evacuees.

The school is located in an area that was once part of the mandatory exclusion zone but has since been declared safe.

The institution is using a building that was formerly a junior high school, but it plans to construct a new building by April 2019 and to open a junior high school.

Some of the freshmen were enthusiastic about the town's future.

"I would like to help rebuild," said student Yuki Sato, 15, who grew up in Tomioka and has been living as a displaced person since March 2011.

Sato expressed excitement about the new start and said he has come to appreciate the beauty of a place whose population was once forced to flee.

Two weeks after the accident, Sato's family sought refuge with relatives in Kashima, Ibaraki Prefecture, and he attended a public elementary school there.

"I had a hard time making friends in a close-knit community," he recalled.

However, over time he adjusted to the new environment and his social contacts grew. He later entered a junior high school and became a member of the baseball club, where he made many more friends.

Sato returned to his hometown last summer for the first time in four years. He found abandoned rice paddies and rats running through his family's home, which was now covered with mold.

He also saw a sinister sight: piles of black plastic bags stuffed with contaminated soil.

"It was much worse than I had expected," he said. "I had seen such things on TV, but I was really shocked when I saw it with my own eyes. It was really hard to accept what had happened there."

Sato is a boarder. He will enter the school's dormitory and live away from his family for the first time, despite the pain of new separation from relatives and friends in Kashima.

"But I'd like to learn more about the district, because I believe there is a kind of revitalization that can be done only by the people who actually live in Futaba," he said.

Sato said that in the future he hopes to open a coffee shop in the area where local residents can meet and chat.

At Futaba Mirai Gakuen he will concentrate on business classes and plans to continue playing baseball. The opening of Futaba Mirai Gakuen allows education authorities to consolidate efforts to keep alive local schools affected by the disaster. Five prefectural high schools formerly located in Futaba have been offering distance learning for evacuees, but because of the opportunities at the new school these services will cease in April 2017.

The school will offer a broad range of classes, focusing on sports, business and welfare, giving students a good preparation for university entrance exams and helping them to obtain national qualifications. Study-abroad and research programs conducted in coordination with universities will also be available.

The students will get lectures from visiting experts, including astronaut Naoko Yamazaki and government representative Shinjiro Koizumi, the Liberal Democratic Party's parliamentary secretary in charge of recovery in the Tohoku region.

Local produce in a cozy atmosphere

April 8, 2015

HARUTOMO HAGI: Fukushima chef boosts local farmers with unique 'one-party-per-day' restaurant

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/globe/people/AJ201504080096>

By YURI OIWA/ Staff Writer

IWAKI, Fukushima Prefecture--Three months after the Fukushima nuclear disaster unfurled in March 2011, business came to a standstill at chef Harutomo Hagi's French restaurant here.

Even the few diners who did drop by expressed fear over radiation-tainted food products from Fukushima, saying it was like a "litmus test" on their allegiance to the region.

Facing trying times and having to make a difficult decision, the 39-year-old Iwaki native decided to not only open a new restaurant, but this new establishment would serve meals prepared exclusively with regional food products.

"I became convinced that gourmets would come all the way to Iwaki to enjoy the taste of local food products, which is a strong point of Iwaki," Hagi said. "I decided to run my restaurant in a way that I really wanted to, even if I risked having no customers."

To allow customers to enjoy local produce in a cozy atmosphere, Hagi opened the new "Hagi" restaurant in a residential area in central Iwaki, with a policy of accepting just one party a day.

Each morning, Hagi visits local farms and markets to pick up the freshest produce of the day and then decides on the menu for the day's dinner. He cooks and prepares it all himself, from appetizers to desserts, and even bakes his own bread.

Hagi and his wife are the only people working at the restaurant. Dinner is priced at 10,000 yen (\$83) or more per person, which is enough to keep the restaurant in business.

"Vegetables, fish and meat all come from living things, so their condition differs each day," Hagi said. "As a chef, you must pick produce in its best condition each day to serve truly ingredient-oriented cuisine."

After opening his new restaurant, Hagi visited a number of local farmers to learn about their expertise in farm products.

"Hagi is the only chef I've seen who will sample all vegetables by eating them raw to test their quality--except garlic and varieties of potatoes," said Ryoji Sato, the 67-year-old operator of Namakiba Farm in Iwaki, which produces fertilizer-free organic vegetables.

The publicity generated by the restaurant's policy has drawn broad attention from gourmets throughout Japan, and Hagi is now determined to help promote "eat locally" around the world.

In fall 2013, Hagi was invited to cook in the kitchens of the Elysee Palace in Paris, the French presidential residence, and at the royal residence of Prince Albert II of Monaco.

It was the first time he returned to France, where he had learned his cooking skills while working as an intern at French restaurants.

His courses at the Elysee Palace, using ingredients from Fukushima, from smoked "shamo" chicken from Kawamata to desserts using local peaches and sake, were lauded by President Francois Hollande.

"I was impressed by the collection of wine glasses at the Elysee Palace and the wines in the cellars at the royal residence in Monaco," Hagi said. "It made me realize that European countries are truly committed to protecting their food culture."

After returning to Japan, Hagi stepped up his efforts to promote local foods, especially locally grown vegetable varieties, by developing new products such as jelly and dressings in cooperation with local farmers.

Although all agricultural products from Fukushima are required to pass stringent safety checks before entering markets, many restaurant owners and chefs are still hesitant to use the products for their customers.

Hagi hopes his efforts and the publicity garnered by his restaurant will help eradicate the public's fear of food products from Fukushima.

He is currently working with local food producers to introduce "Vegetable Labo," an experimental kitchen in Iwaki where chefs, food producers and customers work together to create new recipes.

"I owe much to my friends who make me try new things all the time," Hagi said.

Keep the sign!

April 14, 2015

Evacuee from Fukushima town wants nuclear signboard kept in hometown



Yuji Onuma video records blooming cherry trees in his hometown of Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture, on April 13, 2015. (Mainichi)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150414p2a00m0na011000c.html>

FUTABA, Fukushima -- A 39-year-old man from this town has launched a signature-collecting campaign to keep a signboard here on which a slogan reads, "Nuclear power -- bright future energy," as a reminder of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear meltdown.

Yuji Onuma of Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture, visited his hometown on April 13 to view cherry blossom trees standing in front of the signboard. Onuma thought of the slogan written on the board when he was an elementary school student.

He began collecting signatures to conserve the signboard on March 18 after the Futaba Municipal Government decided to remove the board on the grounds that the aging structure could fall down.

"I don't want it removed so we can remember the nuclear disaster," Onuma said.

Onuma was born and raised in Futaba, but was forced to evacuate as the whole town became a no-entry zone in the wake of the nuclear crisis. His home is located just around the corner from the signboard.

Onuma video recorded the cherry trees in full bloom during his temporary visit from outside the prefecture and plans to show the video to his 1- and 3-year-olds who have never seen their father's hometown.

April 14, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

10,000 young salmon discharged into Fukushima river

April 16, 2015

Juvenile salmon released to keep spawning cycle alive in a Fukushima river

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201504160003>

By NAOYUKI TAKAHASHI/ Staff Writer

TOMIOKA, Fukushima Prefecture--Although all residents of Tomioka remain evacuated due to the nuclear accident, a local fishermen's union is ensuring that salmon don't disappear from a local river here as well. On April 15, union members, along with employees of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co., and companies engaged in decontamination work, released juvenile salmon into the Tomiokagawa river for the first time since the March 2011 disaster.

They discharged a total of about 10,000 young salmon into the waters of the river.

According to the fishermen's union, it released about 800,000 juvenile salmon annually into the river before the nuclear accident. Of these, about 1,600 salmon had been thought to have returned to the river to spawn.

However, the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, which occurred on March 11, 2011, destroyed the spawning grounds where their eggs hatched. The annual release of the juvenile salmon was also suspended.

Young salmon that were released before the disaster continued to return to the river until 2014. However, the number of salmon that return is expected to decrease.

In response, **the fishermen's union resumed the release so the cycle will continue.**

At present, all Tomioka residents are living in other municipalities as evacuees following the nuclear accident, triggered by the earthquake and tsunami.

When the tsunami engulfed the town, the union's leader, Isao Igari, then 73, was swept away and remains missing. His son Kiyomi, 50, is currently serving as the leader of the union.

"My father was looking forward to releasing juvenile salmon with children," Kiyomi said, adding, "I am looking forward to seeing children return to this town and make it bustling again."

Thinking outside the box

April 19, 2015

Determined sake brewer seeks to revive Fukushima with renewable energy

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201504190028>

By TOSHIHIDE UEDA/ Senior Staff Writer

KITAKATA, Fukushima Prefecture--Yauemon Sato's determination to forge ahead with his ideas, no matter how unorthodox, has led fellow workers to describe him as "a dump truck with broken brakes." This way of thinking has apparently helped to keep his family's sake brewery in business since 1790. It could also be the reason why local governments are investing in the 64-year-old's plan to revitalize Fukushima Prefecture.

After the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011, Sato decided that the only way the prefecture could be revived was through renewable energy sources.

In August 2013, he established Aizu Denryoku, an electric power company, and brought together individuals with diverse backgrounds to serve as executives and advisers. One was a special adviser of the Japanese subsidiary of a major U.S. semiconductor manufacturer, while another once headed the Fukushima prefectural board of education.

Another member of the group was an ethnologist who promoted Tohoku area studies.

They were all impressed by Sato's fortitude.

Sato is the ninth-generation chief of the Yamatogawa Shuzoten sake brewery in Kitakata of the Aizu region in western Fukushima Prefecture. When explosions rocked the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co., Sato thought the 200-year old family business was done for.

However, **radiation levels in the Aizu region never reached alarming levels.**

Sato felt somewhat guilty because he continued with his life and business while compatriots in other areas of Fukushima Prefecture were evacuating by the thousands.

"All I thought about was what the Aizu region could do," Sato said. "Nothing will begin as long as all we say is, 'The central government is to blame and TEPCO is to blame.'"

Sato took note of the many power plants already established in the Aizu region, which boasts a bountiful water supply that has helped foster a vast expanse of forest.

Construction of hydraulic power plants in the area started in the Meiji Era (1868-1912), and those plants today have a total generation capacity of about 4 gigawatts.

Much like the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, most of the power generated at those hydraulic plants has gone to the greater Tokyo metropolitan area.

"The water used in hydraulic power plants originally was the rain and snow that fell in the great outdoors of Fukushima," Sato said.

He felt that bringing back such resources would allow Fukushima to generate all the electricity it needed without relying on outside sources.

He also believed that such a move would be important to allow Fukushima to move away from being "a colony" of sorts to the Tokyo area.

Sato started with solar power because installation was much easier than constructing hydraulic power plants.

As a first step, **Aizu Denryoku** built the Oguni solar power plant in Kitakata with an output capacity of 1 megawatt. Smaller facilities were then set up in 23 locations.

By fiscal 2014, Aizu Denryoku and its subsidiaries were operating plants with a combined capacity of 2.54 megawatts and selling the electricity to Tohoku Electric Power Co., which is in charge of supplying all of Fukushima Prefecture.

Aizu Denryoku plans to increase its generating capacity to 5 megawatts by the end of fiscal 2015.

But even at that level, the capacity would only be 0.1 percent of the capacity of the existing hydraulic power plants in the Aizu region.

Moreover, Tohoku Electric in late 2014 introduced a maximum limit on the volume of electricity it would purchase from renewable energy sources.

Such moves are not enough to stop the "dump truck with broken brakes."

"We will move to our next stage," Sato said.

By focusing on the initial target of the bountiful water and forests of the Aizu region, **Sato plans to start micro-hydro power generation and the use of woody biomass.**

Thinking outside the box is in Sato's genes.

In the late 1970s, his father opposed the redevelopment plan put together by the Kitakata municipal government. Instead, he wanted to promote Kitakata as a "town of warehouses" by capitalizing on the heritage of numerous old warehouses remaining in the city.

On one occasion, he spent 70 million yen to move and restore old warehouses. That led some to speculate that the older Sato had lost his mind.

However, there was huge untapped interest in viewing those old warehouses, and the tourism business took off in Kitakata.

The popularity of Kitakata ramen shops also helped to increase the number of tourists from about 50,000 in 1975 to about 1.2 million today.

The younger Sato says **his battle with major utilities will require his own financial resources combined with the power of local communities.**

To bring about that goal, Sato contacted all 17 municipalities in the Aizu region about investing in Aizu Denryoku. In March 2015, four towns and villages decided to inject capital.

"Things are looking more interesting now," Sato said.

What future for 'voluntary' evacuees?

April 17, 2015

'Voluntary' evacuees of Fukushima nuclear disaster face unclear future

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150417p2a00m0na006000c.html>

The approaching deadline for an announcement on whether the provision of emergency temporary housing will be extended has turned the spotlight on those whose evacuations from Fukushima Prefecture are considered "voluntary."

Immediately after the outbreak of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster, the Disaster Relief Act was applied to the entirety of Fukushima Prefecture, making emergency temporary housing facilities available to all Fukushima prefectural residents. Soon afterward, however, evacuation designations for individual municipalities were put into place, and residents were classified into those whose homes were within designated "no-go zones," referred to as "mandatory evacuees," and those whose homes were not in designated "no-go zones," referred to as "voluntary evacuees." In other words, this differentiation between so-called mandatory and voluntary evacuees was made after the residents had already fled their homes.

There are two main types of emergency temporary housing: prefabricated facilities built within Fukushima Prefecture, and public housing and rentals in and outside the prefecture appropriated for use as emergency temporary housing. Because the Fukushima Prefectural Government for the most part made housing within the prefecture available to mandatory evacuees only, many voluntary evacuees live in appropriated housing outside of Fukushima.

Under the Disaster Relief Act and related laws, emergency temporary housing is provided for two years, except for in extreme disasters, in which lease terms can be extended up to a year at a time. In the case of the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake, the provision of such housing went on for just over four years. The central and Fukushima prefectural governments have heretofore announced yearlong extensions three times between late April and late May each year. The expiration for the current extension is late March of 2016.

If the provision of emergency temporary housing were to be discontinued, mandatory evacuees have several options to choose from, including moving to disaster recovery public housing. Voluntary evacuees, meanwhile, do not meet the requirements for moving into such facilities, although many of them are reluctant to return home out of concerns over radiation exposure. Termination of the emergency

temporary housing program would thus lead directly to unclear prospects for so-called voluntary evacuees.

Asked about appropriated temporary housing facilities during a House of Councilors Budget Committee meeting April 9, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe expressed enthusiasm for continuing the program, saying, "I'd like to handle the issue in a way that puts residents at ease."

Why are extensions capped at a year at a time in the first place? The laws cite the durability of prefabricated facilities as the rationale for this rule.

According to the Disaster Relief Act and related regulations, the durability of prefabricated constructions dictates the initial term for the provision of emergency temporary housing as two years. The one-year extensions are made only after the structural durability of the facilities has been confirmed. Public housing and rentals appropriated as emergency temporary housing have longer-term durability than prefabricated housing, but the reasoning, according to a Cabinet Office official, is that the terms are made the same in both types of housing for the sake of fairness.

The evacuees, meanwhile, live in a constant state of uncertainty. A 43-year-old woman who has evacuated to Saitama Prefecture with her husband and two children in junior high and high school, respectively, longs for more stability. "Instead of one-year extensions, which don't allow us long-term prospects, we want to be able to live where we are for several more years until our children graduate from school," she said.

Susumu Tsukui, an attorney well-versed in residential issues surrounding evacuees, is critical of the current system. "It's wrong to set a time frame for emergency housing based on the durability of prefabricated housing," he said. "Instead of trying to cram the current situation into a pre-existing framework, we should be thinking about what needs to be done so that evacuees can live at ease."

Voluntary evacuees living in appropriated emergency temporary housing face other disadvantages, too.

In the spring of 2012, the municipal governments of the Fukushima Prefecture towns of Namie and Futaba -- both of which were wholly designated as no-go zones -- sought approval from the central government to allow evacuees to relocate to new appropriated housing facilities inside and outside the prefecture, a plea that was commonly heard among many evacuees. That August, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, which at the time had jurisdiction over the Disaster Relief Act, and Fukushima plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. sent a notice to the Fukushima Prefectural Government that while they would not permit evacuees to relocate from one appropriated housing to another, evacuees would be able to receive compensation for rental fees of homes they move into after leaving temporary housing. In effect, this was an approval for mandatory evacuees to relocate but does not cover the relocation of voluntary evacuees. The authorities' stance toward voluntary evacuation has been made clear by how it has tried to pass off the burden of rental fees for appropriated housing -- currently covered entirely by the national government -- to TEPCO.

Internal government documents obtained by the Mainichi Shimbun through a freedom of information request show that the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare and the Reconstruction Agency summoned officials from Fukushima, Iwate and Miyagi, the three prefectures hit hardest by the 2011 disasters, as well as officials from Yamagata, Niigata, Tochigi and Saitama Prefectures, which have hosted large populations of voluntary evacuees, to the Fukushima Regional Bureau of Reconstruction in the Fukushima capital on May 24, 2013.

According to inside sources, a Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare official at the meeting proposed that each prefecture bill TEPCO directly for rental fees incurred by nuclear disaster evacuees, pointing to the example of the 1999 JCO nuclear incident in Tokaimura, Ibaraki Prefecture, in which Ibaraki prefectural authorities received disaster relief funds from the plant operator. The proposal was abandoned, however,

after prefectural officials objected, demanding why the prefectural governments and not the central government -- which had heretofore shouldered all the costs -- should have to charge the utility. TEPCO has expressed reluctance to cover the rental fees of voluntary evacuees, and the government has deliberated the possibility of initially billing the power company for the rental fees incurred by mandatory evacuees, but a final decision has yet to be made. If the government ultimately decides not to charge TEPCO for the rental fees of voluntary evacuees, it would imply that TEPCO bears no responsibility for the evacuation of those people. Whoever eventually charges TEPCO for evacuation costs -- a role which prefectural and central government officials tried to foist onto each other in May 2013 -- will have to decide how voluntary evacuees are treated and explain the rationale behind the decision. As one central government official said, "It all comes down to the fact that no one wants to be held accountable."

April 17, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Release of tsunami-ravaged area



Central Kesennuma, Miyagi Prefecture, on March 12, 2011, a day after the earthquake and tsunami disaster (Provided by the Great East Japan Earthquake digital archives support center)

April 22, 2015

Tsunami-ravaged city releases 10,000 images of disaster, reconstruction

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/quake_tsunami/AJ201504220040

By TAKESHI AOSE/ Staff Writer

KESENNUMA, Miyagi Prefecture--This tsunami-ravaged northeastern city has released 10,500 images online of the destruction caused by the 2011 disaster and subsequent reconstruction work. The city made the photos and video footage available in the hope that they will assist in enhancing disaster preparedness and prevention. There are no restrictions on using the images on other websites or publications.

The images, mostly taken by local residents and volunteers from outside the city, cover the immediate aftermath of the disaster triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake through to 2014.

City officials added data to the materials, such as when and where the images were recorded. The project cost around 1.3 million yen (\$11,000).

Many come with local scenery prior to the disaster to compare how the areas changed afterward.

The images were originally kept by the Great East Japan Earthquake digital archives support center.

The Japanese-language website is at (<http://kesennuma-da.jp/>).

To make a query, users can enter keywords such as "tsunami," "fire" and "volunteer," or combine them with place names like "Shishiori Elementary School district" or "Koizumi Junior High School."

Full train service resumes in Miyagi Pref.

April 22, 2015

Tsunami-hit Miyagi railway to resume full operation

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201504220047>

By YOSHINOBU MOTEGI/ Staff Writer

HIGASHI-MATSUSHIMA, Miyagi Prefecture--The tsunami-hit JR Senseki Line is gearing up to resume full operations next month after a trial run was held April 21 on a previously damaged section of track.

Operator East Japan Railway Co. gave media representatives a ride on a segment of the line that has been off-limits to passengers since the 2011 earthquake and tsunami. It allowed reporters to glimpse the area's rebuilding.

The line will resume full service on May 30.

The section that has undergone repair runs 12 kilometers between Takagi-machi Station in Matsushima and Rikuzen-Ono Station in Higashi-Matsushima, both in Miyagi Prefecture.

Part of the section has now been relocated from a coastal area to reclaimed higher ground about 500 meters closer to the mountains.

About 34 km, or two-thirds of the Senseki Line, which connects the prefectural capital of Sendai with the coastal city of Ishinomaki, was destroyed in the disaster triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake. The service has been gradually resuming.

Fukushima still needs money in years to come

April 21, 2015

Fukushima reconstruction bill estimated at ¥3.57 trillion once intensive period ends

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/04/21/national/fukushima-reconstruction-bill-estimated-at-%C2%A53-57-trillion-once-intensive-period-ends/#.VTeDlpPwmos>

JJI

FUKUSHIMA – At least ¥3.57 trillion will be needed to rebuild Fukushima over a five-year period starting in fiscal 2016 after the “intensive period” for post-disaster reconstruction, set by the government, ends in fiscal 2015, the prefectural government said Tuesday.

The estimate was unveiled at the daily meeting of the prefecture’s headquarters for promoting reconstruction. In light of the estimate, the prefectural government plans to seek financial support from the central government.

During the intensive period, the central government is to cover the cost of all reconstruction projects in the prefecture and all other areas damaged by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, which triggered the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

“Reconstruction of disaster-hit areas will enter a crucial stage from now,” Fukushima Gov. Masao Uchibori said at the meeting, adding that his prefecture will work to secure reconstruction funds in a stable manner over the long term.

Fukushima is considering asking the central government to shoulder ¥2.49 trillion of the ¥3.57 trillion, excluding decontamination expenses, which the prefecture plans to charge to Tepco, and costs to be covered by reserve funds.

Revised laws for Fukushima recovery

April 24, 2015

Fukushima reconstruction funds law revised

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150424_27.html

Apr. 24, 2015 - Updated 07:54 UTC+2

Japan's Diet has enacted a revised law to approve the wider use of funds to speed up recovery work in the areas in Fukushima Prefecture that were affected by the 2011 nuclear disaster.

The Upper House on Friday passed amendments to special legislation on funds for reconstruction projects and economic support in Fukushima.

The revised law allows for spending to build roads and sewer systems in areas that are designated as evacuation zones, in preparation for the return of residents.

The law also gives tax exemptions on up to about 417,000 dollars in income from the sale of property in areas that will house administrative offices and homes.

This is to promote land sales in such key regions.

Tax benefits will be extended to business owners who return home and resume commercial enterprises.
They will be able to write off funds accumulated for capital spending as losses.

Reconstruction minister Wataru Takeshita said he believes the legislation will help speed up the recovery of Fukushima and facilitate the return of residents.

Cheering up Fukushima children

May 28, 2015

After spontaneous remark, gifts from Germany lift spirits of Fukushima children

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201505280007>

By YOSHITAKA ITO/ Staff Writer

AIZU-WAKAMATSU, Fukushima Prefecture--Nobuyo Tada beamed at the sights and sounds of disaster-affected pupils swinging on playground equipment here, the result of a spur-of-the-moment comment she had made in Germany.

"I am filled with deep emotion," the 62-year-old said in April on her first visit to Fukushima Prefecture. The equipment at an interim elementary school in Aizu-Wakamatsu city was one of the gifts sent from Europe through a campaign led by Tada and her German husband, Degenhard von Twickel, 65, to support victims of the March 2011 disasters.

The interim school accepts children from two elementary schools in Okuma who fled their homes after the accident unfolded at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Tada, a native of Miyazaki Prefecture, flew to Germany in her early 30s to study music therapy. She met von Twickel there, and they now live in Billerbeck, a town of about 10,000 people, in the western German state of Nordrhein-Westfalen.

News reports of the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster were broadcast in Germany, and local media descended on Tada in droves for interviews.

"We live in a small town, and I am the only Japanese resident," she explained on April 22.

Tada recalled being gripped by a sense of urgency to help the victims.

"I want to help Japan. Please lend a helping hand," Tada said during an interview on a radio show.

She said she had not planned to ask for assistance, but the words simply came out.

"I cannot explain well what was on my mind when I made that appeal, but I was thinking that I have to do something at any rate," Tada said.

Although not prepared, her words had the desired effect.

A day after the broadcast, elementary school children who listened to the show began seeking cooperation from adults to help the devastated Tohoku region, a trend that spread throughout Billerbeck and the surrounding towns.

Von Twickel, an ardent participant in volunteer activities, and Tada's friends and acquaintances joined forces. The combined effort collected about 7 million yen (\$56,900) in donations.

Tada decided to use the money to help victims of the Fukushima nuclear disaster. She said she associated the accident with her father who was exposed to radiation from the atomic bombing of Nagasaki in August 1945.

Through her friends, Tada learned that the coastal town of Okuma, which co-hosts the crippled nuclear plant, resumed classes at the interim school in Aizu-Wakamatsu in midwestern Fukushima Prefecture, but the school was short of educational materials.

The school incorporates the Ono Elementary School and the Kumamachi Elementary School, both run by the Okuma town government.

Tada resolved to present the swing, vaulting boxes, gymnastics mats, a jungle gym and other equipment to the children. The gifts arrived in Fukushima within a year of the disasters.

Tada had attempted to visit Fukushima Prefecture a few years ago, but poor health prevented her first trip there.

On April 22, she expressed the couple's feelings for the children at the school. She interpreted for her husband, who cannot speak Japanese very well.

"We saw the future of the children. We want them to hold on to their hopes," Tada said. "There are many Germans who will always remember and support them."

Splitting residents : Preserving symbols of disaster (or not)

April 30, 2015

For tsunami-hit town, preserving disaster symbol becoming a taboo subject

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/quake_tsunami/AJ201504300003

By TORU FURUSHO/ Staff Writer

MINAMI-SANRIKU, Miyagi Prefecture--Every week, a woman prays in front of the rusted skeletal framework of a building that once housed this town's disaster response center, the site where her husband was swept away by the 2011 tsunami.

"It's getting warm, so I brought you this," she said, holding a can of beer in front of a stand for flowers, in late March. "You must be thirsty."

The woman in her 50s hopes the structure will remain in Minami-Sanriku, saying it is a comforting reminder of her husband and one of only a handful of places left where she can feel his presence.

But her parents-in-law want the three-story building dismantled as soon as possible. They said they cannot mourn their son quietly with the constant stream of onlookers flocking to the site to view the testimony of the tsunami's destructive force.

The dispute over the future of the building extends well beyond the family.

"Town residents have been split over the question," Minami-Sanriku Mayor Jin Sato acknowledged. "There has been an atmosphere discouraging even the town's civil servants from speaking about it since many lives of their relatives were also lost."

What to do with the 12-meter high structure has become somewhat of a taboo topic. The woman said the issue is too delicate to broach with her in-laws, who live with her. And many locals are reluctant to openly debate plans for the building.

The woman's husband, a town employee, was urging people to flee from an imminent tsunami triggered by the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake that jolted Japan's northeastern coast on March 11, 2011.

He and 42 others in the building, most of them town employees, were killed. They were among 800 people in Minami-Sanriku who died or went missing in the catastrophe.

The town of 14,000 has been going through a sweeping transformation since the disaster. Work to elevate the land has been under way to protect residents and descendants from a future tsunami.

Fierce opposition greeted Miyagi Governor Yoshihiro Murai when he visited the town in January to inform the mayor that the prefectural government wanted to put the building under its ownership until 2031.

About 30 protesters held up a banner to underscore their desire to tear down the rusting structure.

"We can still see the expressions of our father and mother, son and daughter, husband and wife. We are pained and vexed. We urge the town to demolish the building soon," the banner read.

Miyoko Chiba, 68, who was among the protesters, lost her son-in-law, a town employee, when the tsunami hit the disaster response center building. The couple's 3-year-old daughter and the parents of the son-in-law were also killed in the disaster.

Chiba's daughter survived while visiting Kesennuma, a neighboring city in the prefecture.

But the daughter, overwhelmed by grief, developed depression after moving into temporary housing and would not interact with others. She now lives alone outside Minami-Sanriku. She said the sight of the ruined building is "unbearable."

She also declined Chiba's invitation to move in with her parents when their new home is built in the town next year.

"Do we really need to keep the building that still traumatizes those who lost their loved ones?" Chiba asked.

The governor's meeting with the mayor in January came after a panel of experts recommended to prefectural officials a month earlier that the skeletal framework, "a symbol of the disaster," be preserved.

"It has a global recognition comparable to that of the Atomic Bomb Dome (in Hiroshima)," the panel said. The panel was established in 2013 on Murai's order to discuss what to do with the Minami-Sanriku building and other damaged structures. The governor was growing anxious that powerful reminders of the tsunami were disappearing in Miyagi Prefecture.

The No. 18 Kyotoku Maru, a 330-ton trawler that was carried by the tsunami into a residential district of Kesennuma, was dismantled in 2013. A large majority of the city's residents backed the idea to tear it down despite the Kesennuma mayor's insistence that it should be preserved.

In Onagawa, the demolitions of two four-story buildings that were both overturned by the tsunami were decided to make way for rebuilding work.

The Minami-Sanriku town hall was leaning toward preserving the disaster response center building in the immediate aftermath of the disaster.

But after hearing the grievances of some bereaved families, Sato in September 2011 announced that the town government would dismantle it.

About a year later, three separate petitions were filed by residents, including relatives of the dead. One called for preservation, another for postponing the demolition, and the third one urged dismantling in the near future.

The town government in 2013 reaffirmed its policy to tear it down, in line with the town assembly's adoption of a petition a year earlier.

"The town hall cannot pay the upkeep costs if the building is preserved," a town official explained.

After this development, the governor stepped in.

"I understand that it will be difficult for the town to have closure soon on the issue that is now splitting the town," Murai said to the mayor. "I would like town officials to decide when the building is returned to the town 20 years later."

The time frame of 20 years was based on the fact that it took Hiroshima 21 years after the 1945 atomic bombing to finally decide to preserve the Atomic Bomb Dome, now a World Heritage site. There had been an emotionally charged debate until the prickly issue was put to rest.

In his visit to Minami-Sanriku again on April 9, Murai reiterated his stance. The prefecture plans to pick up the tab for keeping the structure.

The town hall sent questionnaires to each household this month to find out where residents stood on the issue.

Wataru Oikawa, 33, welcomes the governor's proposal. He submitted a petition with the town assembly in January, saying that the disaster response center building should go under the prefectural government's ownership until Minami-Sanriku residents can discuss the issue in a calm manner.

He said it took him a year or so to accept the death of his father, a town employee who also remained in the building when tsunami approached.

"I could finally regain some normalcy because there has been progress in rebuilding homes and lives," he said.

While Oikawa is aware that many are still struggling to deal with their losses, he also thinks it is important to preserve a reminder of the disaster for future generations.

"I hope that we would be able to fully explain why we reached a decision, whatever it is, to children who will forge the future of the town," he said.

Mayor Sato is expected to announce his decision on whether or not to accept the governor's proposal as early as May.

"Are they just going to go ahead?"

April 29, 2015

Outrage in Fukushima Prefecture at gov't's revival plan for nuclear power

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150429p2a00m0na006000c.html>

The national energy supply plan released by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry on April 28 was met with dismay in Fukushima Prefecture, since its proposed national energy mix for 2030 is premised upon a revival of nuclear power -- despite the existence of numerous local electric power utilities that use renewable energy.

More than 110,000 Fukushima Prefecture residents remain displaced both within and outside the prefecture following the 2011 meltdowns at the Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

In the village of Iitate, where all residents remain displaced, local villagers raised funds for the Iitate Electric Power Co. -- a locally produced, locally consumed utility that is premised upon the creation of electric power using natural sources from the village.

Laments company president Minoru Kobayashi, 62, "Is the government truly planning to continue relying upon nuclear power, even after causing such a major disaster?"

Iitate village lost its rice fields, forests, and livestock -- in other words, its lifeblood -- due to the nuclear disaster. Kobayashi established the company last year in September, basing it upon the slogan "a power station of the villagers, by the villagers, for the villagers."

The firm began selling power generated at a photovoltaic power plant that was launched in the village this year in February, and also has future plans to generate wind and biomass energy.

"As time passes, are they just going to go ahead and forget about what happened at the time of the accident, and about the disaster areas?" asked Kobayashi, mincing no words against the government.

Prior to the establishment of the Iitate Electric Power Co., citizens in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Kitakata funded and set up the Aizu Electric Power Co. in August 2013. Commented company president Yauemon Sato, 64, "I find the government's attachment to nuclear power completely incomprehensible."

The company began operating a large-scale photovoltaic power plant last year in October, and has set up solar panels in a total of 23 locations. This fiscal year, it plans to generate a total of around 2.23 million kilowatts of energy for some 700 households.

"The government should base its energy ratio upon the premise of not using nuclear power -- and it should accelerate the speed at which it is implementing renewable energies," Sato said pointedly.

Fukushima must do away with "caldrons of hell" (Sato)

May 1, 2015

INTERVIEW/ Yauemon Sato: Fukushima must reclaim energy resources to avoid 'caldrons of hell'

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/opinion/AJ201505010047>

By TOSHIHIDE UEDA/ Senior Staff Writer

KITAKATA, Fukushima Prefecture--Yauemon Sato, the ninth-generation chief of a sake brewery operating here since 1790, likens the crippled reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant to "caldrons of hell."

In a recent interview with The Asahi Shimbun, Sato said the nuclear disaster "continues to recur every day," referring to the huge stockpile of radioactive water that keeps growing--and often leaks--more than four years after the core meltdowns.

Aizu Denryoku, an energy company that he founded in 2013, was his answer to the question of what direction the "Fukushima rebirth" should take after the nuclear disaster.

As a corporate manager, Sato was determined not to be content with a "mere social movement."

He now runs more than 20 solar power plants.

Sato also plans to venture into micro-hydropower generation and the use of woody biomass, which will allow his business to tap into resources generated by the bountiful water and forests of the Aizu region in western Fukushima Prefecture, where Kitakata is located.

“Aizu has enough energy resources to be self-sufficient,” Sato said. “The water of Lake Inawashiroko and the water of the Tadamigawa river initially used to be ours. It’s probably time to have them returned to us.”

Excerpts from the interview follow:

* * *

Question: What drives you to be so active, including in the use of renewable energy?

Sato: You know the caldron of hell? You will be sent to hell and will be boiled in that caldron if you do evil. And there are four such caldrons in Fukushima Prefecture, at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co.

Q: You mean the No. 1 through No. 4 reactors that succumbed to accidents, right?

A: Yes. And the disaster has yet to end. It continues to recur every day.

More than 300 tons of water, contaminated with intense levels of radioactive substances, are being generated every day at the nuclear plant, right? We have a family business of a sake brewery, with a yearly turnover of about 350 million yen (\$2.9 million). We brew about 300 kiloliters of sake, which weighs some 300 tons, every year. More radioactive water is being generated day after day than the amount of sake we produce in a year.

Q: The whole village of Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture, remains evacuated to this day because of the nuclear disaster. You had been supporting Iitate even before the nuclear disaster was triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. Could you elaborate on your work?

A: Everything started when the chamber of commerce and industry in the village asked me to brew sake with rice from Iitate. I agreed to be a “Madei ambassador” to support the village, and the appointment ceremony took place in January 2011. The nuclear disaster broke out only two months later.

Iitate has nothing to do with nuclear power. “I will have to help in some way or other,” I thought to myself.

Q: “Madei,” which means something like “cordially” in the local dialect, is a catchword of Iitate’s community development efforts, right?

A: Yes. Norio Kanno, mayor of Iitate, said at the appointment ceremony that community development of a “Madei village” was almost complete. But all that was ruined by the nuclear disaster.

Why, to begin with, did Fukushima Prefecture host as many as 10 nuclear reactors? Well, it did so to send electricity to Tokyo. But Fukushima Prefecture residents were not asserting themselves loud enough in the face of the central government and TEPCO.

These were some of the ideas I shared with Yumiko Endo, former head of the Fukushima prefectural board of education, and with Norio Akasaka, a Gakushuin University professor of ethnology who is promoting “Tohoku studies.” And the first thing we did was to set up Fukushima Kaigi, a forum for citizens to think about a “Fukushima rebirth,” in the summer of 2011.

Q: That forum gave you an opportunity to get to know Jun Yamada, a senior adviser to Qualcomm Japan, the Japanese arm of the major U.S. chipmaker, right?

A: Yes. Yamada and I discussed what we should be doing from that time on, and we agreed that we were both corporate managers who were by no means living aloof in a world of serious literature. It was no use just cursing the central government and TEPCO. We should not content ourselves with a mere social movement. So we eventually agreed: Why not set up a business?

Q: And the business you set up was Aizu Denryoku, right?

A: Yes. Just imagine, what are the requisites for human lives? You can maintain your life if only water, food and energy are available.

The 17 municipalities of Fukushima Prefecture's Aizu region have a combined population of 280,000 or so. And the region has enough rice and energy resources to be self-sufficient. The hydropower plants in Aizu alone have enough generation capacity to cover the power demand of all households in Fukushima Prefecture.

Q: But those hydropower plants belong to TEPCO, Tohoku Electric Power Co. and Electric Power Development Co. Most of the electricity they generate is being sent to the greater Tokyo area. What do you think about this arrangement?

A: The rights to use water for generating power are not in our hands. But the water of Lake Inawashiroko and the water of the Tadamigawa river initially used to be ours. It's probably time to have them returned to us.

The nuclear plants also stand on the soil of Fukushima Prefecture. Why are our resources always being taken away? Let's go and reclaim what has been taken away from us--that's what I am saying.

Q: Tohoku Electric has set a maximum limit on the volume of electricity it would purchase from renewable energy sources. What is your approach to the tough job of breaking vested interests?

A: My father began skipping wholesalers and retailers to sell our sake directly to tourists in Kitakata. That sparked terrible outrage from associations of wholesalers and retailers. But when customers, once they had acquired an appetite for our products, began placing orders with retailers, those retailers had to deal in our products in the end. A clientele will never fail to materialize if only you make fine products.

Q: You have a growing circle of like-minded people. Iitate Denryoku, a solar power generation company, was set up in Iitate in September 2014, with you as vice president. How are these efforts going?

A: Another group of people in Tadami, Fukushima Prefecture, is moving to set up a Tadami Denryoku power generation company. Four of the 17 municipalities in the Aizu region--Inawashiro, Bandai, Nishi-Aizu and Kita-Shiobara--decided in March to invest in Aizu Denryoku.

We are aiming to create what we would call a "stock company of a public nature." We are still facing various challenges, such as the question of rights over the use of water. But we plan to spread micro-hydropower generation, which uses water from rivers and other familiar sources, and the use of biomass, which relies on wood from forests and other sources, in the years to come.

Solar power generation is something we just began with to solidify the foundation of our company.

Q: You are calling on all municipal governments in Aizu to inject capital in your company. What kind of role do you expect governments to play?

A: Community development is up to local people in the private sector, and it is not something that governments are supposed to take into their hands. Governments are there to back up what the private sector does. That's how the efforts to promote (Kitakata) as a "town of warehouses" and a "town of ramen" really took off and got on track.

* * *

Born in 1951, Yauemon Sato, a graduate of the Department of Brewing and Fermentation at the Tokyo University of Agriculture Junior College, began serving his apprenticeship at the Yamatogawa Shuzoten sake brewery, his family's business, in 1973.

He was inspired by how his father, Yauemon Sato VIII, scrambled to promote Kitakata as a "town of warehouses" and engaged in architecture preservation efforts of the Japanese Association for Machi-nami Conservation and Regeneration.

Sato, who took over his family business as the ninth-generation chief in 2006, also serves as CEO of the Japan Jizake Cooperative, which organizes local sake brewers, and as chief secretary of an all-Japan

association of locally based energy providers, whose founders include power utilities that serve localized areas.

Aizu Denryoku was named after a company that existed before World War II. It was so named in hopes of reviving the tradition of its predecessor, which supplied electricity to local communities.

Temporary housing for nuclear evacuees

May 3, 2015

News Navigator: What are the temporary housing options for Fukushima evacuees?
<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20150503p2a00m0na007000c.html>

The Mainichi Shimbun answers some common questions readers may have about apartment complexes and regular houses that are used as temporary housing for nuclear evacuees from Fukushima Prefecture. Question: How do these apartments and houses for the evacuees differ from temporary housing units?

Answer: They are legally the same as apartment complexes that are provided to the evacuees free of charge under the Disaster Relief Act. While temporary housing units are prefab homes built specifically for those who suffered damage in the 2011 triple disaster, the "de facto" temporary shelters make use of vacant rental apartments and public houses that are already completed.

As of March 1 this year, 112,762 evacuees lived in 47,158 rent-free apartments, or around 55 percent of all disaster temporary accommodations. The government introduced empty apartments and homes extensively to the evacuees as their temporary housing due to delays in construction of prefab homes. The expansion of nuclear no-go zones has also prompted the use of existing apartments for the evacuees. It presents a stark contrast from the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake in which 139 existing homes were used as temporary accommodations.

Q: Where are those apartments and homes located?

A: As many Fukushima residents sought shelters away from the crippled nuclear station, those accommodations are located in all 47 prefectures except for Ehime. There are 10,793 housing units deemed as temporary shelters for the evacuees in Fukushima, Miyagi and Iwate prefectures, and 27,333 people currently live in those houses.

Q: Why are the de facto temporary homes occupied mostly by "voluntary" evacuees who chose to leave their hometowns?

A: There was no distinction between voluntary evacuees and those who had been forced to leave their homes due to high levels of radiation in the initial stage of the meltdown. The government subsequently issued evacuation orders depending on the distance of a location from the nuclear station. On April 22, 2011, those who resided in areas where annual radiation dosages topped 20 millisieverts were forced to evacuate, drawing a distinction between the "voluntary" and "forced" evacuees.

Because the Fukushima Prefectural Government initially admitted only the forced evacuees to the prefab temporary homes in the prefecture, many voluntary evacuees left Fukushima to live in vacant apartments provided by other local governments.

Q: Can evacuees apply to live in those accommodations now?

A: No. The Fukushima government notified other local governments not to accept applications for temporary housing from December 2012.

However, the evacuees are concerned about how much longer they can stay in those homes without paying rent. The voluntary evacuees, in particular, do not receive a large amount of compensation, and they will have to give up living in the places to which they have evacuated if the housing provision is cut. The national and Fukushima governments need to listen to the evacuees' needs in mapping out policies regarding those buildings that are used as temporary shelters. (Answers by Kosuke Hino, Special Reports Group)

FLIP and Lawson's agreement to help evacuees long term

May 3, 2015

Lawson to offer long-term jobs to Fukushima evacuees nationwide

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201505030022



The Asahi Shimbun

By NORIYOSHI OTSUKI/ Senior Staff Writer

Convenience store chain operator Lawson Inc. will be hiring evacuees from the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster to work at its outlets as well as offer them future employment after returning to their hometowns.

It marks a rare endeavor to help displaced people land a long-term job contract in a broader region after the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident forced them to evacuate, according to experts.

“People can acquire job skills while working at a Lawson outlet in evacuation and take advantage of their expertise by continuing to work at a Lawson store near their homes after their return,” said a senior Lawson official.

The initiative is expected to help evacuees financially as tens of thousands are still living away from their homes and facing economic difficulties amid the prolonged evacuation.

Lawson, which faces a chronic shortage of workers, will also likely benefit from the arrangement. The chain has 12,000 outlets nationwide.

Positions available are as cashiers at Lawson outlets and making boxed meals at business partners’ factories. Distributing products is a possibility in the future.

The program followed an agreement Lawson reached with FLIP, a private organization assisting evacuees in Niigata, Niigata Prefecture, on a framework for assistance in April.

Those eligible are 46,000 nuclear disaster evacuees who are now living outside Fukushima Prefecture.

The program is also targeted at people who have evacuated to various sites in the nation at their own initiative from prefectures other than Fukushima to avoid radiation exposure, as well as evacuees from the quake and tsunami from prefectures other than Fukushima.

FLIP, whose F stands for “family, friends, future, Fukushima,” and LIP for “live in peace,” will call on support groups for evacuees across the nation to gather information on job seekers and relay the information to Lawson Staff in Niigata, which handles dispatching workers to outlets and job training.

Lawson Staff will refer applicants to stores and conclude contracts between workers and stores.

Lawson Staff is also expected to make arrangements for evacuees to continue working at outlets near their new homes when they relocate.

Most workers under the program will start with nonregular employee status, but can be hired as regular employees, depending on their job skills.

10,000 plaintiffs against TEPCO

May 5, 2015

Plaintiffs soon to exceed 10,000 in lawsuits against TEPCO seeking extra compensation

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201505050033>

By ATSUSHI KOMORI/ Senior Staff Writer

Dissatisfied with government-orchestrated compensation, the number of local residents and others affected by the Fukushima nuclear crisis who have sued Tokyo Electric Power Co. is expected to soon top 10,000 plaintiffs.

According to a lawyers' group supporting the plaintiffs, a total of 9,992 people, including those who lived in evacuation zones or voluntarily fled their homes, have joined 25 lawsuits filed with 20 district courts

and court branches across Japan, including Sapporo and Fukuoka, by the end of April in the four years since the disaster.

The first such case was brought to court in December 2012 by evacuees from Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture, and elsewhere.

The plaintiffs are demanding that TEPCO, operator of the wrecked Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, pay additional compensation and bring down radiation levels near the facility to pre-disaster conditions. Because 900 people have joined the suits since January, the number of plaintiffs seeking compensation for damages related to the nuclear disaster triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in March 2011 will most likely exceed 10,000 in the not-too-distant future, the lawyers' group said. Most of the plaintiffs are also seeking compensation from the central government based on the state redress law. In another massive litigation, more than 20,000 residents living near the U.S. Kadena Air Base in Okinawa Prefecture in 2011 called for compensation for damages caused by aircraft noise in the third lawsuit related to the military base.

Based on guidelines compiled by the national Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation, TEPCO has been paying compensation to those forced to evacuate from their hometowns after the nuclear crisis. The utility is also compensating local business operators for losses associated with the disaster.

But the plaintiffs are arguing the payments are insufficient and demanding that TEPCO pay additional compensation until the radiation readings return to pre-disaster levels, and that the utility compensate the victims for the "loss of their hometowns."

A very special exhibition

May 5, 2015

Try this for an artistic treat: An exhibition in Fukushima that few will see

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201505050007>

By NORIYOSHI OTSUKI/ Senior Staff Writer

IWAKI, Fukushima Prefecture--An exhibition of art works that few people will likely ever see is now under way in areas of Fukushima Prefecture rendered uninhabitable by the 2011 nuclear disaster.

The works are being displayed in areas designated by the government as "difficult-to-return" zones, says Kenji Kubota, who serves as curator of the exhibition.

Given that it could be decades, perhaps even longer, before the zones are declared safe from radiation, Kubota, 49, said the idea behind the exhibition is to "evoke people's imagination on what works are being displayed."

Implicit on his comment is the notion that this undertaking could go on for many years.

Because radiation levels remain high in the areas, the government restricts entry. As such, members of the public basically will have no opportunity to see what is on show until the restrictions are lifted, and there is little prospect of that happening in the near future.

VENUES FOR ART WORKS STAY SECRET

Difficult-to-return zones are those where radiation levels could exceed 50 millisieverts per year.

The zones encompass an area of 337 square kilometers spanning seven municipalities, including the towns of Okuma and Futaba, which jointly host the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. Currently, some 24,000 residents are living in other municipalities as evacuees.

On a morning in mid-April, four men ranging in age from their 20s to 40s gathered in Iwaki, southern Fukushima Prefecture, which is outside the designated zones.

The men drove in a rental car toward the crippled nuclear plant about 50 kilometers northward. As members of the organizing committee for the exhibition, their mission was to display the pictures at appropriate locations in the difficult-to-return zones.

Kubota, an associate professor of arts at the University of Tsukuba, told the other three that they would be joined by artists en route.

The exhibition kicked off on March 11, the fourth anniversary of the earthquake and tsunami disaster that triggered the nuclear crisis.

Even after the opening, new art works have been brought into the difficult-to-return zones one after another.

Twelve groups of artists, including non-Japanese, are cooperating with the project. The number of art works offered by each group ranges from one to more than 10.

While the names of the artists are available, the venues for the exhibition will remain secret until the designation as difficult-to-return zones is lifted. Owners of buildings where the exhibits are displayed are also sworn to secrecy. Even among evacuees, only a few people know about the exhibition.

'DON'T FOLLOW THE WIND'

Kubota said he received a proposal in late 2012 from a group of six young artists collectively named "Chim Pom" to hold an exhibition in the difficult-to-return zones.

"We want to convey the (nuclear) accident, which was rare in human history, to the world as a problem that affects all of mankind," he was told.

The six artists had created art works related to atomic energy or nuclear power generation.

For example, they added drawings, which could remind people of the 2011 nuclear accident, on the "blank portions" of a wall painting on atomic and hydrogen bombs by renowned artist Taro Okamoto (1911-1996) in Tokyo's Shibuya station.

They also repainted the Rising Sun flag so that it resembled the radiation hazard symbol on a hill overlooking the Fukushima nuclear plant, and took video footage of their endeavor.

Kubota was attracted by the proposal.

"We may be able to stop people from forgetting the Fukushima (nuclear crisis) with art works' power of conveying information to others," he recalled thinking at the time.

Kubota also collected donations after the triple meltdown to support people who had been engaged in cultural and artistic activities in Fukushima Prefecture.

In a nod to evacuees who fled south toward Tokyo after the nuclear accident to avoid exposure to wind-borne radiation blowing in a northwesterly direction, Kubota and other members of the organizing committee decided the exhibition should be titled "Don't Follow The Wind."

ANGER OF THE ANGLERFISH

An orthopedic clinic in central Iwaki is named, "Ganbaru Sekkotsuin," which literally means "orthopedic clinic that works hard." It receives about 80 patients daily, of whom 20 to 30 percent are evacuees from areas near the Fukushima nuclear plant.

The director of the clinic, Morio Yaguchi, 60, operated an orthopedic clinic in Futaba, but had to close it after the nuclear accident. He evacuated to Iwaki and reopened his clinic there in March 2012.

When he was living in Futaba, he also served as a judo instructor for local children in Futaba and surrounding municipalities, such as Namie.

Yaguchi allows his home in Iwaki to be used for meetings of organizing committee members. He also offers them advice about local issues.

"Ideas that young artists come up with are beyond my imagination," Yaguchi said while laughing. "I cannot understand them.

"I just hope the exhibition is so attractive that people make lines to see the works when the designation as difficult-to-return zones is lifted," he added.

A drawing of an anglerfish that is Yaguchi's pride and joy is displayed in the waiting room of his orthopedic clinic. It was drawn by an acquaintance and painter simply called Mineoka, who is from Iwaki. The artist's real name is Mineo Midorikawa.

The anglerfish is baring its teeth, implying that it is angry at the sea that has become contaminated with radioactive substances, according to Yaguchi.

When Yaguchi opened his orthopedic clinic in Iwaki, it became a venue for evacuees living in local districts to meet up with each other.

"Elderly people living in temporary housing facilities hugged each other in the waiting room (of this clinic) while shedding tears," said Yaguchi.

"They understood the anger of the anglerfish," he added.

No high seawall for Nonoshima island

May 4, 2015

Residents of tsunami-hit island call for lower seawall to preserve ocean views

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/quake_tsunami/AJ201505040064

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

SHIOGAMA, Miyagi Prefecture--Despite their experience of the deadly tsunami four years ago, residents of Nonoshima island do not want a high seawall erected that spoils views of the Pacific Ocean.

As a safeguard against future tsunami, the Miyagi prefectural government plans to construct a coastal wall that will rise 3.3 meters above sea level.

On the southern coast of the island, 31 houses were destroyed by the tsunami spawned by the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011.

But Nonoshima's 100 or so residents are demanding that the coastal barrier be no higher than 2.3 meters. Nonoshima island is part of a group of islands in Matsushima Bay off the coast of Shioagama in Miyagi Prefecture.

In March, the islanders set up two mock walls made of plywood--one at 3.3 meters in height and the other at 2.3 meters--to see if there was a significant contrast.

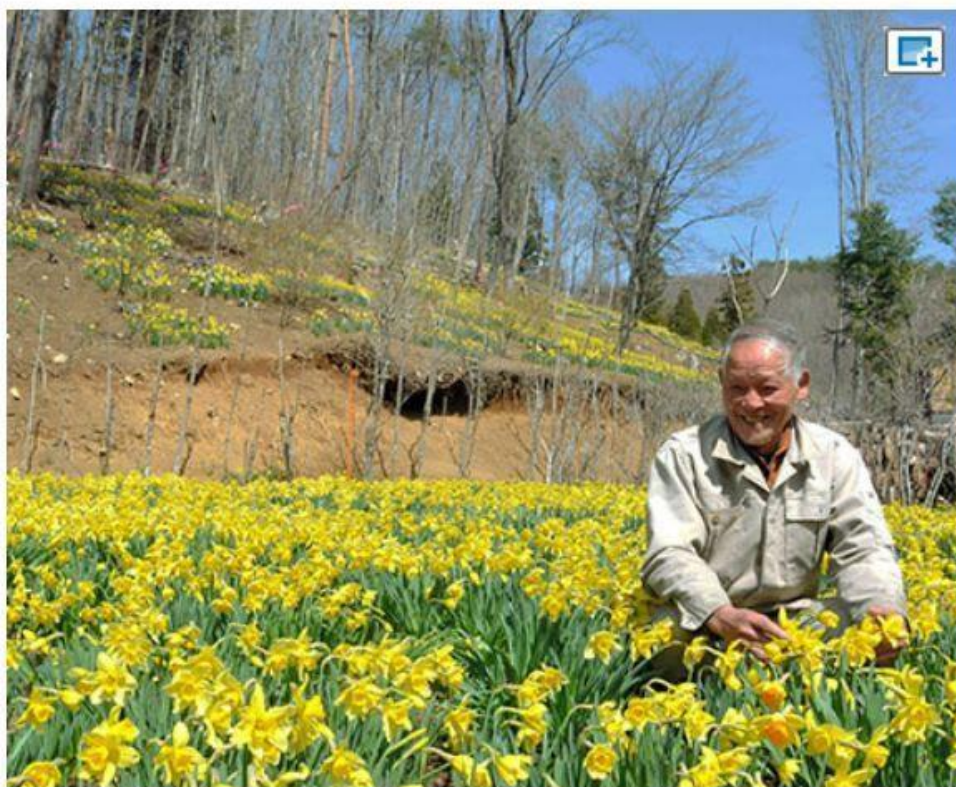
"Even just 1 meter higher makes a huge difference to the seascape," said Torao Suzuki, head of the local residents' association.

Blossoms can be enjoyed for generations

May 7, 2015

Fukushima evacuee aims to repay kindness with garden full of sakura

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201505070061>



Kinichi Okubo sits in a field full of yellow narcissus flowers in Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture, in April. (Yukiko Seino)

By YUKIKO SEINO/ Staff Writer

IITATE, Fukushima Prefecture--Kinichi Okubo dreams of the day the garden around his home is filled with mature **cherry blossom trees that will flower for generations to come.**

Achieving the goal is **his way of thanking people who supported him through hard times following the 2011 nuclear disaster.**

Okubo, 75, has had a passion for flowers and plants since childhood, and his efforts over the past 40-odd years paid off as friends marveled April 19 at the carpet of yellow narcissus blooming across the entrance of his home, garden and paths along the fields beyond.

Okubo, who used to make his living here as a farmer, modestly acknowledged the bonhomie with a shy smile.

Okubo, a native of Iitate, recalled that he always wanted to pick the wild flowers he encountered along the mountain trail he took to school. He started by planting Japanese primrose that grew in a marsh around the well in his yard. He originally brought back narcissus that had sprouted where an old coal oven used to stand.

After narcissus wither, Japanese iris start to bloom in his garden. And once fall arrives, autumn crocus dye his garden purple. Asian skunk-cabbage grown in a stream near his charcoal burner hut has multiplied over the years.

When he was not cultivating flowers or planting cuttings, Okubo enjoyed gathering wild edible plants in the mountains in spring and mushrooms in autumn. But his life underwent a drastic change on March 11, 2011, with the nuclear crisis triggered by the earthquake and tsunami disaster.

The magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake struck around the time Okubo was making charcoal for the "kotatsu" (heated table with blanket) in his house. Iitate was designated as an evacuation zone after the nearby Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant went into triple meltdown. He evacuated with his 96-year-old mother Koto.

Okubo said he returned to his temporary home in Fukushima city one evening in autumn 2011 and he found his mother alone in a room without the lights on.

"I don't want to die in a place like this," he heard her mumble. His mind went blank.

His mother's words snapped him into returning to his home in Iitate to spend the new year holiday period there.

Okubo felt a strong attachment to his home because it stands on a patch of land his parents cleared themselves. The family continued growing rice there, even after they were forced to scale back their operations to comply with government policies.

"I don't want to desert this land where my parents spent so long trying to make a go of things," Okubo said. "This is where I want to spend my last moments."

Yet today, he is unable to grow rice or vegetables on his land. He would sometimes awake in the middle of the night and think, "If only the nuclear power plant never existed." Invariably, he was unable to go back to sleep.

Okubo decided to plant the cherry trees as a way of thanking his friends who stood by him during the hardships following the earthquake and tsunami. He had befriended many of them in gardening shops and elsewhere. He said they called him up after the disaster and sent him water, food and other supplies.

Okubo initially thought of growing rice again once his fields were stripped of contaminated top soil, but some warned him that people may not feel comfortable with eating rice from Iitate.

That was when he decided to grow cherry trees instead because the blossoms can be enjoyed for generations.

Last spring, Okubo planted cherry tree saplings around his house with his friends and other people. With the help of experts, he had surveyed the quantity of radioactive materials contained in the soil and removed the surface layers beforehand.

He continues to plant cherry saplings on former rice paddies and land formerly used to grow crops. Okubo expects that more than 150 saplings will have been planted within the year.

Each tree was given a distinctive name by his friends, such as "Mirai-zakura" (Future cherry) and "Shuppatsu-zakura" (Departure cherry). He contemplates planting narcissus flowers between the cherry trees.

"Growing more flowers to see people with smiles on their faces has become one of my joys," Okubo said. A year after the first saplings were planted, dozens of tiny cherry blossoms bloomed this spring.

After the (food) scandal

May 2, 2015

Japan calls on Taiwan to ease up on planned food import restrictions

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201505020044>

By SATOSHI UKAI/ Correspondent

TAIPEI--Japan has urged Taiwan to scrap its plan to tighten restrictions on food imports from Japan, but Taipei demanded that Tokyo first address a food-labeling scandal.

Taiwan accused food companies of falsely labeling products from nuclear-stricken Fukushima Prefecture and other places in an attempt to evade the import ban.

A Liberal Democratic Party delegation, which included Nobuo Kishi, a former vice foreign minister, met with Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou on May 1 and asked Ma to retract the decision to impose stricter regulations on Japanese food products.

Taiwan banned imports of food items produced in Fukushima and four other prefectures after the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake triggered the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Tokyo had been working to get Taiwan to ease regulations when it was discovered in March that some food products from the five prefectures were imported with forged place-of-origin labels saying they were from elsewhere in Japan.

In response to the scandal, Taiwan decided to strengthen restrictions on Japanese food imports. Effective May 15, the tighter regulations will require importers to submit results of radiation level checks for certain food articles from specific areas outside the five prefectures.

According to Kishi, the latest request is in line with the intention of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

During the May 1 meeting, **the Japanese side argued that the false labeling issue is a "separate matter" from tightening restrictions, and said the tighter regulations have no scientific basis.**

According to the Taiwan presidential office, Ma said the priority is seeking out the truth behind the scandal and developing preventive measures. He also requested that Japan make efforts to resolve the issue.

Just a way "to ensure fairness" of treatment

May 12, 2015

New 3.11 disaster recovery plan requires local bodies to bear part of financial burden

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150512p2a00m0na015000c.html>

The Reconstruction Agency has announced a basic policy of restoring areas devastated by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and ensuing nuclear crisis that would require local governments to shoulder part of the costs.

After consulting with the local bodies in disaster-hit areas, the agency will officially approve the plan at a meeting of its Reconstruction Promotion Council in late June, officials said on May 12.

Reconstruction Minister Wataru Takeshita told a news conference that the agency "tried to **ensure fairness**" **between the restoration of areas hit by the March 2011 disasters and those affected by other disasters.**

Under the current basic policy of reconstruction that was worked out in 2011 under the previous administration led by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), the government designates the period up to fiscal 2020 as the reconstruction period during which the state will extend much financial assistance for such efforts.

The new government policy would regard a five-year period from fiscal 2016 as a "period for reconstruction and recreation" of disaster areas. **The plan would then classify restoration projects into three categories** -- fully central government-funded projects, projects that local governments would be required to partially fund and projects financed jointly by national and local governments like projects undertaken by local bodies unaffected by the disasters.

Projects fully funded by the national government are limited to core restoration projects as well as countermeasures against the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

The construction of new coastal levees, the construction and improvement of ports and harbors as well as roads leading to coastal areas that contribute to local vitalization and future disaster preparedness would fall under projects partially funded by local bodies even if these projects are related to restoration work. However, the plan would require local bodies affected by the disasters to shoulder less financial burden than ordinary projects.

The construction and improvement of roads in inland areas and tourism promotion would follow under the third category and local governments would be required to shoulder the same ratio of financial burden as projects undertaken by other local bodies unaffected by the disasters.

The central government changed its policy to require affected local governments to shoulder part of the financial burden **to encourage these local bodies to consider the cost-benefit performances of restoration projects and become more self-reliant.**

Since the national government has fully funded restoration projects, the outstanding amounts of affected local bodies' savings, called "fiscal adjustment funds," have snowballed. The outstanding amount of savings of The Iwate Prefectural Government in fiscal 2013 stood at 31.5 billion yen, up 178 percent from fiscal 2009 before the disaster, while that of the Miyagi Prefectural Government grew 381 percent to 34.4 billion yen over the same period. These figures are far above the national average of a 45 percent increase. Considering these improvements in the fiscal conditions of disaster-hit prefectural governments, the national government has deemed it necessary to require these local bodies to shoulder certain financial burdens for reconstruction work to win the understanding of taxpayers.

KEPCO wants to raise the price of electricity

May 12, 2015

Kepco to raise household electricity rate by 8.36%

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/05/12/business/economy-business/kepco-raise-household-electricity-rate-8-36/#.VVIM6pPwmic>

Kyodo

Kansai Electric Power Co. will raise the amount it charges households for electricity by an average of 8.36 percent starting June 1, industry minister Yoichi Miyazawa said Tuesday.

Higher imported fossil fuel costs are weighing on the firm's earnings in the absence of nuclear power following the 2011 triple meltdown at Tepco's crippled Fukushima No. 1 plant, Miyazawa said.

The Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry has judged the margin of the markup should be trimmed from the average 10.23 percent rise originally sought by the utility, reflecting recent drops in crude oil prices and other factors.

Miyazawa added the rate will be set at 4.62 percent during the four months through September to ease the burden on households. To keep the bill hike smaller than initially proposed, Kansai Electric will slash executive compensation and boost efforts to streamline business.

The ministry is expected to approve the rate hike soon.

Kansai Electric, which relied heavily on nuclear power to generate electricity before the Fukushima crisis, initially sought to raise prices starting in April. But its plan was delayed as discussions within the government dragged out on whether the proposed hike was appropriate.

All of Japan's commercial reactors were offline by September 2013 amid heightened safety concerns in the wake of the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 plant. They remain idled pending the nuclear regulator's safety review, based on more stringent requirements.

Kansai Electric President Makoto Yagi told a press conference in Osaka the company plans to lower the rate when its nuclear plants go back online.

The utility, which serves Osaka and neighboring areas, last raised prices for household electricity by 9.75 percent in May 2013.

Hokkaido Electric Power Co. also raised its electricity prices last year.

Another lawsuit against TEPCO from "difficult to return" zone residents

May 14, 2015

'Difficult-to-return zone' residents to bring class-action suit against TEPCO, gov't

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150514p2a00m0na010000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- Residents of a Fukushima town district designated as a "difficult-to-return zone" due to high levels of radiation from the ongoing disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant are set to file a class-action lawsuit against the government and plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO).

The lawsuit will be the first class-action suit brought by residents of a difficult-to-return area, defined as an area with a yearly cumulative radiation dosage of over 50 millisieverts.

Around 100 residents of the Tsushima district of Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, are preparing to sue the national government and TEPCO for failing to lay down a plan for decontamination and robbing the residents of their hometown. Although it has yet to be decided how much in damages the plaintiffs will demand, the lawsuit is set to be filed with the Iwaki branch of the Fukushima District Court as early as this summer.

Tsushima district is a forested, mountainous area some 30 kilometers northwest of the Fukushima No. 1 plant, where rice and tobacco cultivation, forestry and dairy farming were common and some 1,400 people lived prior to the disaster.

By filing the lawsuit, the plaintiffs hope to show that the farmland, local traditions, and community bonds they'd nurtured over generations have been ripped away from them and not been recovered. They will seek damages for the emotional suffering they've experienced and demand decontamination to return their hometown to its pre-disaster state.

Failure to see significant progress from the alternative dispute resolution (ADR) system -- set up as a system through which Fukushima nuclear disaster victims can settle out of court with TEPCO -- is one of the reasons Tsushima residents decided to file the suit. In March 2014, the ADR center suggested a compromise in which the monthly 100,000 yen per person TEPCO pays to victims of the disaster for emotional pain is raised to 150,000 yen. However, the ADR center's reconciliation recommendations are not legally binding, and TEPCO has refused to comply with the proposal on the grounds that it would be unfair to residents of other municipalities.

"My distrust of the government has grown as it continues to turn a blind eye to TEPCO's rejection of the proposed compromise," says a Tsushima district resident who plans to join the lawsuit. "I decided to participate in the suit in order to make (TEPCO and the government) take responsibility, including the responsibility to decontaminate."

The Ministry of the Environment still has not announced a plan for decontamination in difficult-to-return zones.

According to a lawyer for the plaintiffs, another class-action lawsuit has been filed by some 340 residents of the Miyakoji district of Tamura, Fukushima Prefecture, located 20 to 30 kilometers from the stricken nuclear plant and once designated as a "zone preparing for evacuation in case of emergency," demanding 3.7 billion yen in damages for destroying the community. The upcoming Tsushima case, however, is the first to be brought by residents of a difficult-to-return zone.

May 14, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

"The Government doesn't understand our situations"

May 13, 2015

Residents in disaster-hit regions unhappy over gov't plan to end some projects

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150513p2a00m0na016000c.html>

The central government plans to terminate 10 projects at the end of fiscal 2015 under a plan unveiled on May 12 by the Reconstruction Agency.

The government says the projects are those that have achieved their goals or those that are no longer needed or have little urgency. But a resident in a disaster-hit region in Japan's northeast said, "The government doesn't understand our situations." The reactions from the disaster-stricken regions underscore gaps with the central government which wants to promote "self-reliance" for the afflicted areas.

The projects set to end at the end of fiscal 2015 include the "information assistance project" for those who voluntarily evacuated outside Fukushima Prefecture and other people in the wake of the outbreak of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. The budget for the project is about 100 million yen for this fiscal year. The project involves the hosting of networking events outsourced to entities such as nonprofit organizations in eight prefectures across the country, as well as counselling on livelihoods for

those who evacuated outside Fukushima Prefecture, among other activities. Under the project, newsletters containing information on disaster aid have been issued.

According to the evacuation assistance division at the Fukushima Prefectural Government, about 46,000 people are taking shelter outside the prefecture. The project has been used not only by those who voluntarily evacuated but also those who fled from evacuation zones to areas outside Fukushima.

A prefectural government official in charge of the project angrily said, "I don't see the reason why the central government will terminate a project 'derived from the nuclear plant (disaster),' which it is supposed to fully finance." A 78-year-old man, who evacuated from the Fukushima Prefecture city of Minamisoma and is currently taking shelter in the Tochigi Prefecture city of Shimotsuke, said, "Being told that it will 'finish after five years,' I feel like I'm also being abandoned." Osamu Satake, 75, who evacuated from the Fukushima Prefecture city of Minamosoma to the Niigata Prefecture city of Sanjo, said, "It's painful to think that burdens will be placed on local governments that are accepting evacuees when the project is terminated."

In Fukushima Prefecture, a "next-generation renewable energy research and development project" designed to back up efforts to develop renewable energy will be terminated. A prefectural government official in charge of the project said, "Because this is a core project to reconstruct Fukushima, we want the government to continue to provide support."

Among the projects destined to be terminated at the end of fiscal 2015 is the "emergency job creation project." Using the project, some local governments have been patrolling around temporary housing units. In Iwate Prefecture, about 60 people have been hired for the project to patrol around temporary housing units at least in Kamaishi, Rikuzentakata and Yamada.

At temporary housing units in disaster-stricken regions, programs have been carried out to provide speaking partners to the elderly and help people with dementia come back to their residences from wandering about, among other activities. If the project is terminated, such programs will be gravely affected. A prefectural government official in charge of the project said, "Employment support will be needed in disaster-hit regions from now on, too."

May 13, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

More evacuation orders to be lifted

May 14, 2015

LDP eyes lifting evacuation orders for some Fukushima municipalities

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150514p2a00m0na009000c.html>

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) is eyeing to lift evacuation orders in some areas near the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant by March 2017, affecting more than 50,000 evacuees, it has been learned.

The LDP's Headquarters for Accelerating Reconstruction after the Great East Japan Earthquake has drawn up a proposal to be submitted to the government, requesting that government-set evacuation orders be lifted in so-called "residency restriction zones" and "areas preparing for the lifting of evacuation orders." No areas in "residency restriction zones" have seen evacuation orders lifted thus far.

Because the government has not specified when residents evacuated from those areas in the aftermath of the 2011 nuclear disaster will be allowed to return to their hometowns, the proposal is likely to spark debate on the issue.

The proposal, which is a draft for the fifth recommendation for reconstruction, states that **"evacuation orders (in those areas) will be entirely lifted within six years after the nuclear accident at the latest, making it possible for residents to return home."**

A total of 55,000 residents will be affected by the lifting of evacuation orders -- some 23,000 in "residency restriction zones" and roughly 32,000 in "areas preparing for the lifting of evacuation orders." Annual radiation doses in the former zones are over 20 millisieverts but below 50 millisieverts, and the latter at 20 millisieverts or less.

The proposal also requests that the government address measures to restore infrastructure and vital services and accelerate decontamination work in order to lower radiation levels in those areas at an early date. The government plans to continue financing decontamination work beyond the intensive reconstruction period, which is set to expire in March 2016.

Meanwhile, evacuation orders for some 24,000 residents in so-called "difficult-to-return zones," where yearly radiation doses top 50 millisieverts, will be retained. The Fukushima Prefecture towns of Futaba and Okuma fall under those areas.

In 2014, evacuation orders in part of the Fukushima Prefecture city of Tamura and the prefectural village of Kawauchi were lifted in April and October, respectively. Both areas were part of "areas preparing for the lifting of evacuation orders."

Taiwan tightens restrictions on Japanese food

May 15, 2015

Hayashi: Taiwan's measure regrettable

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150515_17.html

May 15, 2015 - Updated 04:37 UTC+2

Japan's agriculture minister Yoshimasa Hayashi says it is extremely regrettable that Taiwan has tightened restrictions on food imports from Japan.

Hayashi told reporters on Friday that there are no scientific grounds for the decision and he will urge Taiwan to retract the unilateral measure.

Hayashi added that Japan may file a complaint with the World Trade Organization and take other steps as well if the negotiations with Taiwan do not make sufficient progress.

Taiwan tightening rules on food imports from Japan

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150515_03.html

May 15, 2015 - Updated 00:45 UTC+2

Taiwan is tightening restrictions on food imports from Japan. It created the rules in response to the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident.

Taiwan has banned food imports from Fukushima and 4 other Japanese prefectures since the nuclear accident.

But it emerged in March that food from the prefectures was imported to Taiwan. The news prompted consumer groups to call for stricter regulations.

Starting on Friday, Taiwan is requiring all food imported from Japan to carry certificates proving the prefecture of origin. Some food from certain Japanese areas must also pass radiation inspection.

Taiwan's health officials held a news conference on Thursday.

They claimed they will be flexible with the new rules. They added that information written on quarantine and other already-mandated documents can be used as certificates of origin.

However, Taiwan has not yet agreed with Japan on specific ways to implement the new regulations. Japan is asking Taiwan to withdraw the measures, citing a lack of scientific justification.

Japanese food is popular in Taiwan. Supermarkets and Japanese companies are concerned that if customs inspections get even tougher, the volume of Japanese food they sell may decline.

Lack of coordination

May 14, 2015

Editorial: Better coordinate new policy on restoring disaster-hit areas

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20150514p2a00m0na003000c.html>

Concerns have been raised over whether the government's new policy of restoring areas hit by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and ensuing nuclear crisis could adversely affect reconstruction efforts. Under the plan announced by the Reconstruction Agency, restoration projects would be classified into three categories and require local bodies in disaster areas to bear part of the financial burden of such efforts. Moreover, 10 restoration projects would be discontinued by the end of the current fiscal year.

It is inevitable for the national government to require local governments in disaster-hit regions to shoulder part of the burden as the restoration efforts have entered a new phase. However, the new policy could require disaster areas to shoulder excessive burdens. The central government should hold careful

consultations with relevant local governments and coordinate views with them in compiling a restoration budget and working out specific restoration projects.

Up to now, the national government has fully footed restoration efforts as it designated the period from fiscal 2011 to fiscal 2015 as an "intensive reconstruction period." Therefore, the latest decision represents a departure from this previous policy.

Under the new policy, restoration projects would be classified into three categories -- fully central government-funded projects, projects that local governments would be required to partially fund and projects financed jointly by national and local governments like projects undertaken by local bodies unaffected by the disasters. In line with this, the scope of fully central government-funded projects would be narrowed to cover only core restoration projects, such as relocation of residents to higher ground and construction of housing for those who lost their residences to the disasters as well as countermeasures against the Fukushima nuclear crisis among others.

Since the central government is being forced to rehabilitate its debt-ridden finances, it is inevitable to require local bodies to partially fund restoration projects. However, one cannot help but wonder how far the national government considered the new policy's impact on disaster victims. In particular, the national government's decision to discontinue 10 projects on the grounds that these have already completed their roles has perplexed local bodies as well as residents in disaster areas. Some affected local governments have used one of these projects aimed at creating jobs to secure enough personnel to patrol temporary housing complexes. Another project to provide information to those who have voluntarily evacuated from their homes in areas affected by the nuclear disaster to other prefectures is also being utilized by those who have forcibly fled their home in evacuation zones and are taking shelter outside Fukushima. One other project to support the development of renewable energy in Fukushima Prefecture will also be terminated although it is crucial for Fukushima's disaster recovery.

Under the new policy, local governments in disaster areas would be required to shoulder part of the financial burden of public works projects in these regions except core projects. It is necessary to review the construction of huge coastal levees, over which there is controversy even among local residents. However, many road construction works are closely related to restoration plans.

Based on the new policy, the central government will work out a new framework for assistance for restoration projects at the end of June. There are growing calls within the government urging local bodies in disaster-hit areas to be self-reliant. However, local governments as well as residents in disaster areas have already made strenuous efforts to overcome difficulties. Such calls for disaster areas to be self-reliant -- as if to say these areas have relied heavily on the national government -- could trigger an unnecessary conflict.

The new policy has already caused anxiety to municipalities in disaster areas whose fiscal base is relatively weak. The central government estimates that it will need to set aside approximately 6 trillion yen for fresh reconstruction projects, well below the 8 trillion yen estimated by local bodies affected by the disasters. Amid financial difficulties, the central government should once again hold talks with affected local governments to identify projects indispensable for disaster recovery and narrow the perception gap with disaster areas.

May 14, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Kepco's price hike approved by Govt.

May 15, 2015

Government approves 8.36% price hike for Kepco

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/05/15/business/corporate-business/government-approves-8-36-price-hike-kepco/#.VVdD9pPwmic>

JJIJ

The government on Friday approved hiking electricity rates for Kansai Electric Power Co.'s household subscribers by an average of 8.36 percent, effective June 1.

Kansai Electric will, however, limit the hikes to 4.62 percent on average for the first four months to lessen the burden on customers during the summer, when air conditioners cause electricity bills to swell.

Kansai Electric will become the second utility after Hokkaido Electric Power Co. to carry out a second round of full-fledged rate hikes since the March 2011 nuclear crisis began at Tepco's crippled Fukushima No. 1 plant, leading to a prolonged spell without atomic energy.

Kansai's first round of hikes, in May 2013, averaged 9.75 percent. It then applied for government approval for another set of increases last December, saying its earnings had deteriorated mainly because of delays in the restart of the No. 3 and No. 4 reactors at its Takahama nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture.

The government will call on the regional power supplier to cut the rates in the event that idled reactors are restarted, officials said.

Let's worry about it before it's too late

May 16, 2015

Are forces of darkness gathering in Japan?

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2015/05/16/commentary/forces-darkness-gathering-japan/#.VVhLq5Pwmif>

by Jeff Kingston

Special To The Japan Times

Certainly it's worse in China, South Korean security recently beat demonstrators and Spain faces a blanket gag rule, but are concerns about the anti-democratic forces of darkness in Japan unduly alarmist? How bad can it be if protestors in Hibiya Park can carry placards depicting Prime Minister Shinzo Abe as Adolf Hitler?

Bad enough, alas. New York Times Tokyo bureau chief Martin Fackler, among others, recently implicated Team Abe in getting Shigeaki Koga, a prominent Abe critic, axed from Asahi TV's "Hodo Station" program. "I am afraid that media organizations' self-restraint is spreading and, as a result, accurate information is not reaching the public," Koga said at a press conference, claiming he was the victim of a political vendetta and corporate media timidity.

Mindful of the orchestrated attacks on the Asahi's news organs and fearful of right-wing reprisals, self-censorship is a growing problem. Columbia University's Gerald Curtis told me about the recent cancellation of a planned television interview that was to take place in New York. The local correspondent informed him that the Japanese network's management in Tokyo nixed the interview because it was going to assess how Abe has handled the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, and this topic was deemed too sensitive.

Curtis says the worrying lesson here is that "the government doesn't have to muzzle the press if the press takes it upon itself to do the muzzling."

But the government is taking no chances.

Conservative Abe cronies were appointed to NHK's top management last year, and Katsuto Momii, a man without any media experience, was named chairman. He later declared to the press, "When the government is saying 'Right' we can't say 'Left.'"

Since Momii began promoting this curious vision at NHK, staff have complained that managers are strictly insisting on wording that hues to government views on controversial topics such as Yasukuni Shrine, disputed territories and the "comfort women." To ensure conformity, NHK now publishes an internal censorship manual, called the "Orange Book," banning the use of the term "sex slaves" and other phrases identified as problematic. NHK insiders told me that some recalcitrant staff suffered career derailments because they didn't toe the line, including a group that openly called on Momii to step down.

There is no smoking gun, and it could be a routine staff rotation, but an apparent casualty of the purge is NHK's "News Watch 9" anchor Kensuke Okoshi, who has spoken out against nuclear power and committed other "transgressions."

Controversy erupted last summer when Naoki Hyakuta, a best-selling writer and conservative on history issues, was handpicked by Abe to serve on NHK's board of governors. Hyakuta criticized Okoshi's on-air comments about ethnic Korean residents in Japan that were aired July 17, 2014. Okoshi said: "The first-generation Korean residents were those who were forcibly brought to Japan or moved to the country to seek jobs after the annexation of Korea in 1910. They had a lot of difficulties establishing their foundations for living."

At the subsequent NHK board of governors meeting, Hyakuta reportedly asked: "Is it acceptable to say ethnic Korean residents are those who were forcibly taken by Japan? That is wrong."

The acting chair informed Hyakuta that as a governor, comments about the content of an individual program violated the broadcasting law. Hyakuta has since resigned his position, complaining he wasn't able to have any impact, but one can imagine that NHK staff felt his presence, and indeed Okoshi is no longer a newscaster despite being one of the most respected in the business.

"The systematic suppression of the press and freedom of speech by the Abe government and its functionaries is very, very disturbing in terms of its effects on the future course of Japan and its democracy," says Ayako Doi, a journalist based in the United States who is currently an associate fellow of the Asia Society. In her view, things have gotten significantly worse under Abe. She cites the Liberal Democratic Party's summons of Japanese media executives, the Japanese consul general in Frankfurt's visit to the editors of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, and a Foreign Ministry official's visit to

publisher McGraw-Hill in New York to ask for changes in the descriptions of Japan's comfort women system of sexual slavery written in a U.S. history textbook.

"They have become more numerous, blatant and unapologetic," she says, adding that the government is targeting both Japanese and non-Japanese critics alike.

Japan Times columnist Gregory Clark says the atmosphere of intimidation has become exceptionally "ugly," attributing it to a "right-wing rebound and revenge."

"Something strange is going on," he says, citing recent attacks on progressive media. "Particularly given that Tokyo keeps talking about its value identification with the West."

Well-placed sources in Washington previously told me that even overseas the Japanese government actively disparages Abe's critics, something that Doi isn't surprised by.

"It seems that under the Abe government, efforts to silence critics of his policies and interpretation of history have become systematic," she says. "It now appears to be a concerted effort orchestrated by Kantei (the prime minister's office)."

Japan's right-wing media also engages in trans-Pacific intimidation. For example, a rightwing pundit slammed the National Bureau of Asian Research's Japan-U.S. Discussion Forum, making groundless accusations about an anti-Japan bias. He also attacked the Japan Foundation's Center for Global Partnership for sponsoring a research project regarding Sino-Japanese relations and history issues. This research project was deemed a waste of Japanese taxpayers' money and some of the researchers were subject to defamatory attacks on their professional integrity. But it would be a sad day for Japanese democracy if the right wing gets to set the research agenda, pick the scholars and decide what they should conclude.

Clark himself was publicly defamed for his alleged anti-Japanese views because he raised some questions about government and media representations concerning the North Korean abductions of Japanese nationals. Following that, he says his university employer received a cascade of threatening letters demanding he be sacked.

"Requests to write articles for the magazines and newspapers I had long known dried up," Clark says. "Invitations to give talks on Japan's lively lecture circuit died overnight. One of Japan's largest trading companies abruptly canceled my already-announced appointment as outside board director with the vague excuse of wanting to avoid controversy."

Lamentably, he added, "You cannot expect anyone to come to your aid once the nationalistic right-wing mood creators, now on the rise, decide to attack you. Freedom of speech and opinion is being whittled away relentlessly."

Exposing such orchestrated attacks and highlighting the dangers of self-censorship are all the more important in contemporary Japan because, as Doi puts it, media freedom is "sliding down a slippery slope" and it's important to "speak out before the momentum becomes unstoppable."

Jeff Kingston is the director of Asian Studies, Temple University Japan.

Should voluntary evacuees return?

May 18, 2015

Fukushima may end free housing for voluntary nuclear evacuees in 2017

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/05/18/national/fukushima-may-end-free-accommodations-voluntary-nuclear-evacuees-2017/#.VVndN0bwmic>

JJI

FUKUSHIMA – The Fukushima Prefectural Government may stop providing free accommodations at the end of March 2017 for people who voluntarily left areas in the prefecture not subject to nuclear evacuation advisories, sources said.

Officials hope to encourage people who evacuated on their own to return home, but the proposed end to the assistance will certainly draw objections from them.

There have been calls in some Fukushima municipalities that are worried about the lack of progress in the return home of evacuees for an end to the support program.

The prefecture will decide after listening to the opinions of local officials later this month, the sources said.

Of about 115,000 people who have taken refuge in and outside the prefecture, some 36,000 are believed to be from areas that are not covered by the central government's evacuation advisories for radiation from the nuclear crisis that started in 2011.

Many voluntary evacuees are people with children as well as former residents of such areas as the town of Hirono, the village of Kawauchi and the city of Minamisoma, all geographically close to the government-designated evacuation zones.

They sought refuge outside their hometowns mainly due to concerns over exposure to radiation from the reactor meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 plant.

Under the Disaster Relief Act, the prefectural government provides prefabricated temporary housing for nuclear evacuees for free and fully finances their rent for private apartments.

The aid program was originally supposed to run two years, but it was extended by a year twice, with the current version set to expire at the end of next March. For voluntary evacuees, the prefecture hopes to terminate the assistance after another one-year extension, the sources said.

It is looking at continuing the free accommodations for people who fled the designated evacuation areas, the sources said.

Safety (food) concerns easing within Fukushima Pref.

May 17, 2015

Despite rumors, Fukushima food safety concerns ease inside prefecture

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/05/17/national/despite-rumors-fukushima-food-safety-concerns-ease-inside-prefecture/#.VVi0VZPwmid>

Fukushima Minpo

Some 78.1 percent of Fukushima residents bought local food goods in fiscal 2014 rather than produce harvested in other prefectures, up about 10 percentage points from the year before, a survey conducted by the prefectural consumers' group association shows.

The survey indicates that safety concerns among residents about food harvested in the prefecture are easing despite persistent rumors since the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. The survey also showed that more than 80 percent of those surveyed said they had purchased processed food made from Fukushima ingredients.

Despite this bump inside the prefecture, **consumers outside have tended to avoid food produced in Fukushima, calling for continued safety screening.**

The questionnaire was distributed to 1,100 people, including some members of the consumers' group, of whom 1,045, or 95 percent, responded. Respondents came from the cities and towns of Fukushima, Aizuwakamatsu, Koriyama, Iwaki, Shirakawa, Sukagawa, Soma, Nihonmatsu, Minamisoma, Date, Motomiya, Koori, Kawamata, Minamiaizu, Aizumisato, Nishigo, Izumizaki and Namie.

Of the total, 237 were male and 808 were female. Around 28.4 percent were in the 60s, while those in their 20s to 40s comprised 22.1 percent.

When asked which local produce they most often purchased, 63.6 percent said they bought goods harvested near their residences, while 14.5 percent said they bought produce from inside the prefecture but not harvested near their home, the survey said.

Another 12.7 percent said they purchased produce harvested in neighboring prefectures, while 8.0 percent said they bought domestically harvested products that were not from Fukushima or neighboring prefectures, the survey showed.

Those who said they most often purchased overseas produce came to 0.4 percent, putting the number of those surveyed who mainly purchased produce from outside of Fukushima at more than 20 percent. Respondents who most frequently purchased produce harvested near their residence shot up 14.4 percentage points from the year before. In contrast, those who usually bought food from neighboring prefectures fell 5.4 percentage points. Those who bought food produced domestically but not in Fukushima or neighboring prefectures decreased 5.7 percentage points, the poll showed.

According to the survey, 43.9 percent said the reason they bought processed food using Fukushima produce was because they believed it safe, while 27.2 percent cited its taste and 16.7 percent said they were supporting local industry. Those who said they rarely buy such produce stood at 8.9 percent.

Although the association said it didn't have an accurate analysis of each age bracket's consumer behavior, those in their 20s to 40s tended to buy products from outside the prefecture in fiscal 2012, when the first survey was conducted.

However, in the latest survey more of those in the same age bracket said they were purchasing Fukushima produce.

"Although more people in each age category seem to feel that (local Fukushima products) are safe, there are people who still avoid them," said Yoshiko Tasaki, 59, the association's executive. "We're still seeing bipolar tendencies."

The survey also covered Fukushima residents' thoughts on the risks of low-level radiation exposure.

To compare the mindset of consumers in Fukushima and those outside the prefecture, the association asked the same questions as in a nationwide Consumer Affairs Agency's questionnaire.

When asked their thoughts on the risks of exposure to radiation levels so low that health effects weren't detected, 18.1 percent still said it is unacceptable even if it is within approved limits, down 12.9 percentage points from the previous year.

The corresponding figure in the Consumer Affairs Agency survey was 21.0 percent, up 2.1 percentage points, demonstrating a gap between those inside and outside the prefecture.

In fiscal 2015, which began April 1, one of the Fukushima Prefectural Government's top priorities has been to dispel harmful rumors about local food products by promoting the safety of its agricultural produce at a variety of events.

"At present, people outside the prefecture and those overseas still (have concerns over the safety of foods in Fukushima)," said an official in charge of promoting its products at the prefectural office. "We'd like to believe that the best way to tackle the issue and promote our products is by providing accurate information (to consumers)."

This section, appearing every third Monday, focuses on topics and issues covered by the Fukushima Minpo, the largest newspaper in Fukushima Prefecture. The original article was published May 2.

Thyroid cancers in youths

May 19, 2015

Fukushima finds 16 new cases of thyroid cancer in young people

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201505190041>

By YURI OIWA/ Staff Writer

Sixteen young people who lived near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant have been diagnosed with thyroid cancer, prefectural authorities said May 18, although they added it is "unlikely" a direct result of the nuclear accident.

Fukushima Prefecture has been conducting thyroid tests on about 385,000 residents and others who were 18 years old or younger at the time of the onset of the March 2011 nuclear disaster caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

A prefectural panel said the results of the first round of tests that concluded in March 2014 revealed the ratio of those diagnosed or suspected of having thyroid cancer who live near the Fukushima plant was no different than the ratio of the same age group from elsewhere in Japan.

The 16 new cases were detected between January and March, and bring the total number of young people diagnosed with the disease in the testing program to 103. Thyroid cancer can be confirmed only after surgery.

The prefecture is currently conducting its second survey of test subjects, which will be concluded in March 2016.

The latest 16 include 12 individuals who were suspected of having the disease during the first study, and four who were believed to have the disease during the second study.

According to prefectural officials, 112 young people were diagnosed or suspected of having thyroid cancer during the first study, with the figure at 15, thus far, in the second survey, bringing the total to date to 127 people.

Because babies and small children are particularly susceptible to the effects of radiation, many cases of thyroid cancer in infants were reported after the 1986 Chernobyl disaster. However, this has not proven to be the case so far with regard to the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

The prefectural panel will further study the impact of radiation exposure on the frequency of thyroid cancer cases by comparing the findings of the first survey with results of the second study and future check-ups.

4 new thyroid cancer cases emerge in latest checks on Fukushima children

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150519p2a00m0na002000c.html>

Four children have been diagnosed with thyroid cancer in a second round of health checks performed by the Fukushima Prefectural Government in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, it has been learned.

The prefectural government has been testing Fukushima Prefecture residents who were aged 18 or under when the nuclear disaster broke out in March 2011. The four children, who were diagnosed by the end of March, were not among those confirmed to have or suspected of having cancer during the first round of checks.

The four new cases were reported to experts at a prefectural inspection committee meeting on May 18. The first cancer case confirmed during the second round of checks emerged in February. The newest cases bring the number diagnosed with thyroid cancer during secondary checks to five.

A total of 385,000 people were targeted during the second round of checks. As of the end of March, the test results for 120,000 of them had been finalized.

Altogether, 10 children were "suspected" of having cancer. An official from the prefectural inspection committee commented, "At this stage, there's no need to revise the evaluation that any effect of radiation is unlikely."

During the first round of checks, around 300,000 of the 370,000 people eligible to undergo screening were tested, and by the end of March, 99.9 percent of the test results had been finalized. A total of **98 people** were diagnosed as having thyroid cancer, up from 86 people as of the end of last year.

May 19, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Many still have health problems

May 19, 2015

Survey: Large majority of Fukushima evacuees have family members with health problems

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201505190054>

By KEISUKE SATO/ Staff Writer

Nearly 70 percent of evacuees from areas around the damaged Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant have family members complaining of physical or mental problems, a recent survey showed.

Released by the Fukushima prefectural government, the survey covering fiscal 2014 revealed that 66.3 percent of households that fled the disaster area--after the nuclear crisis triggered by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami--have at least one member suffering health problems. The figure was 67.5 percent in the previous survey covering fiscal 2013.

In February, the prefecture sent questionnaires to all 59,746 households that evacuated for the latest study--the second of its kind--and received responses from 18,767 households, or 33.6 percent.

Of the respondents, 13,703 households, or 73 percent, said they were forced to evacuate, while 5,054, or 27 percent, said they voluntarily evacuated.

The survey covered about 20 categories, such as the state of the lives of the evacuees, their health conditions and their intent to return to their homes.

Asked about what bothers them, 57.9 percent said they cannot sleep well. While 56.6 percent said they are unable to enjoy their daily lives as they did before the disaster, 49.3 percent said they tire more easily.

Households that are still in temporary housing or rented apartments for evacuees accounted for 62.1 percent, a 10-percentage-point decrease from the previous survey. Meanwhile, 19.7 percent--10 points higher than the first study--said they live in their own homes.

Although in the fiscal 2013 survey, 40.4 percent hoped they would be allowed to continue living in temporary housing longer than originally planned, 48.7 percent hope so in the latest findings.

In the latest study, 55.8 percent said they hope to continue living in temporary housing because the evacuation order has yet to be lifted for their hometowns. While 42.1 percent said they are currently unable to rebuild their homes on their own, 40.0 percent said they do not have sufficient funds to leave temporary housing.

In March, the central government released results of its survey of nine municipalities ordered to evacuate since the onset of the Fukushima crisis. The prefectural survey asked evacuees from areas other than the nine municipalities where they hoped to reside in the future. The latest findings show 37.3 percent of households that are evacuees living within Fukushima Prefecture said they hope eventually to return to their homes. Those who want to settle where they currently reside accounted for 16.5 percent, and 11.7 percent said they have yet to decide where to live in the future.

In contrast, 31.6 percent of households that evacuated outside the prefecture said they have not determined where to live in the future, whereas respondents who want to settle where they now live or return to their hometowns accounted for 24.2 percent and 19.8 percent, respectively.

Wanting to help

May 19, 2015

Hokkaido police officer starts over as junior in Fukushima to support disaster survivors

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150519p2a00m0na023000c.html>

KORIYAMA, Fukushima -- A Hokkaido police officer who was dispatched to Fukushima for a year to support victims of the 2011 triple disasters has returned, this time as an officer on the Fukushima Prefectural Police force.

Originally from Fukuoka Prefecture in the southwestern island of Kyushu, Akiyoshi Sakamoto, 31, dreamed of becoming a police officer from a young age. After graduating from university, he applied for a job with both the Fukuoka and Hokkaido prefectural police forces and became an officer in Hokkaido in the fall of 2006.

The Great East Japan Earthquake and ensuing tsunami and nuclear disaster struck several years later, and became a pivotal point in Sakamoto's life. He was frustrated that so many people were in trouble, and yet he couldn't do anything to help them. He applied to the Ultra Police Force -- a program in which police officers from across the country are dispatched to search for missing persons and patrol temporary housing facilities in the disaster-hit areas of Fukushima, Miyagi and Iwate prefectures -- and was sent to Fukushima in February 2012.

In Fukushima, Sakamoto was assigned to the reconstruction support division, where he was tasked with patrolling evacuation zones and temporary housing facilities. One of the most unforgettable moments during his time there was when a woman in her 80s living in temporary housing by herself confessed to him, crying, "When the tsunami came, I knew there was an old, bedridden man in my neighborhood, but escaped without going to help him." Sakamoto realized then that many survivors carried with them deep emotional pain. He spent as much time as he could interacting with residents of temporary housing facilities until the end of his tenure in Fukushima in March 2013.

Even after Sakamoto returned to Hokkaido, Fukushima was never far from his mind. He couldn't shake the feeling that there was more he could've done there.

A "temporary assignment" system in prefectural police forces allows officers to be assigned to other prefectural forces until they retire, but police officers can only be appointed to other forces with the approval of the force to which they belong. There had been no previous case of a Hokkaido Prefectural Police officer being assigned to serve on the Fukushima Prefectural Police force, and because Sakamoto thought it was unlikely he could get approval, he decided to quit from his post in Hokkaido.

Sakamoto's supervisor tried to convince him to stay, saying it was a waste to quit when he had just been promoted to sergeant, since he would have to start all over again at the very bottom rank if he applied for a position on another force. But Sakamoto could not be swayed. He took and passed an exam for the Fukushima Prefectural Police and quit the Hokkaido force.

Now in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Koriyama, Sakamoto works at a police box. There are no temporary housing facilities in the area that he covers.

"My first goal is to get an assignment in a division that's involved with supporting disaster victims," he says. "I want to become close enough to them so they feel comfortable calling me by my name instead of 'Officer.'"

May 19, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Will Taiwan ease food regulations?

May 19, 2015

Abe wants Taiwan to remove rules on food

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150519_30.html

May 19, 2015 - Updated 11:18 UTC+2

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has instructed ruling party lawmakers to ask Taiwan again to ease its regulations on Japanese food imports.

Taiwan stepped up regulations on Japanese food last Friday for fear of radiation contamination from the 2011 nuclear accident in Fukushima Prefecture. The regulations include requirements for certificates of origin for all food from Japan.

Abe on Tuesday spoke with former State Minister for Foreign Affairs Nobuo Kishi and other lawmakers who belong to a group to promote exchanges between Japan and Taiwan. The group members recently visited Taiwan.

Kishi reported to the prime minister that they asked Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou to remove the tighter restrictions as soon as possible.

Abe said Taiwan's authorities and people should be aware of the safety of Japanese food. He urged Kishi to continue working to solve the issue, utilizing the group's close connection with Taiwan.

May 18, 2015

Ma: Japanese food ban only for short term

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150518_29.html

May 18, 2015 - Updated 12:03 UTC+2

Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou says Taiwan's tightened controls on food imports from Japan will only be temporary.

Taiwanese health authorities had banned food imports from Fukushima and 4 nearby prefectures in the wake of the March 2011 nuclear accident.

But it was revealed in March that some food from the prefectures was being imported to Taiwan. This prompted calls by consumer groups for stricter regulations.

The authorities further tightened their rules on food imports from Japan last Friday. The measures include requiring that all Japanese food products bound for Taiwan carry certificates proving the prefecture of origin.

President Ma stressed to reporters on Monday that priority lies on dispelling consumer fears over the labeling of food products in Japan. He described the measure as being temporary, and added that health authorities are eager to resolve the issue.

Ma expressed his readiness to ease the restrictions after authorities determine how the banned products reached Taiwanese consumers and steps are taken to prevent similar reoccurrences.

The Japanese side has been urging Taiwan to lift the tougher regulations, calling the steps scientifically groundless. Japanese food exporters have expressed the fear that the revised regulations may increase export costs and make them less competitive in Taiwan.

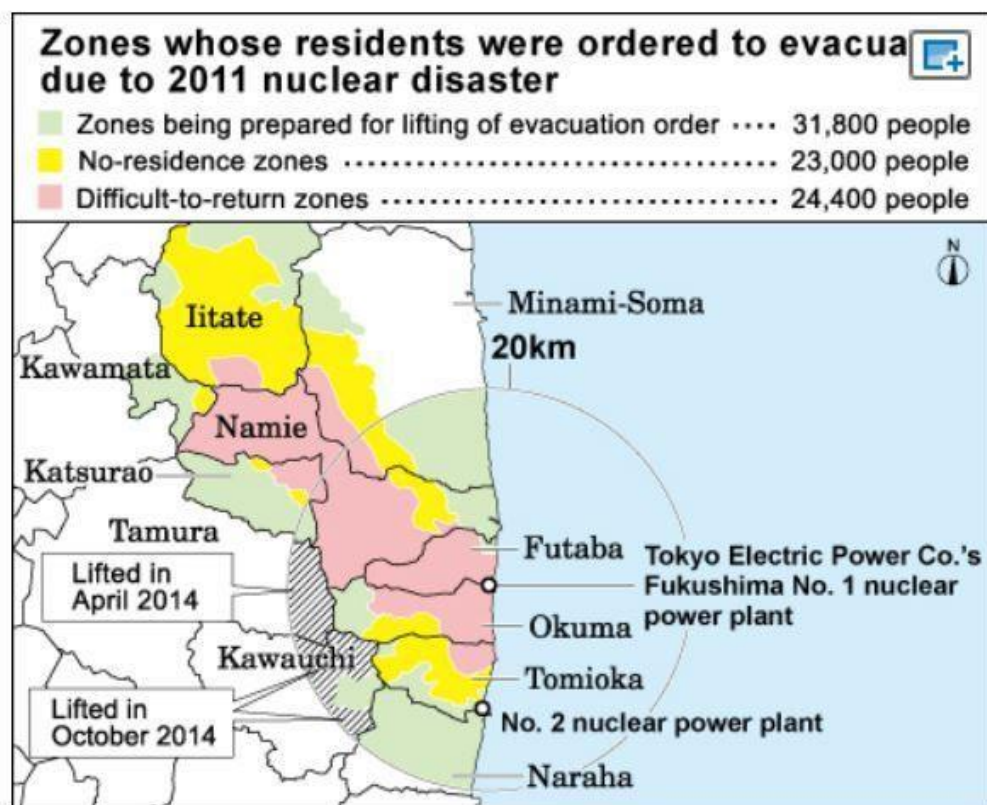
Taiwanese supermarkets have also voiced concern over a possible decline in the volume of Japanese food they sell.

Stopping TEPCO compensation for 55,000 evacuees

May 19, 2015

Ministry plans to end TEPCO compensation to 55,000 Fukushima evacuees in 2018

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201505190055>



The Asahi Shimbun

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The government will instruct Tokyo Electric Power Co. to terminate compensation payments to 54,800 evacuees from the Fukushima nuclear disaster in March 2018, regardless of radiation levels in their hometowns, sources said.

The new compensation plan of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry is based on the assumption that decontamination work will lower radiation levels and enable the government to lift evacuation orders in those areas, the sources said May 18.

Currently, the homes of about 80,000 evacuees are located in three zones designated by the government in terms of severity of radiation contamination.

Around 31,800 evacuees' homes are in "zones being prepared for the lifting of evacuation order," while 23,000 people have fled their homes in what are now "no-residence zones."

TEPCO currently pays each of these 54,800 evacuees 100,000 yen (about \$834) in compensation a month. The new plan will affect evacuees from these two zones.

The remaining 24,400 people have homes located in "difficult-to-return zones," where there are no prospects of lifting the evacuation orders. TEPCO has paid a total of 14.5 million yen to each of these evacuees.

The government's current guidelines on compensation stipulate that payments should end one year after evacuation orders are lifted.

Under the new plan, the government and ruling parties assume that the evacuation period for people in the first two zones will end "six years after the March 2011 nuclear accident." That assumption is based on another assumption that decontamination work will be completed by March 2017 and evacuation orders can be called off by that time.

As a result, compensation payments for people from the two zones will end in March 2018. Each of the evacuees will have received a total of 8.4 million yen during the seven years since the accident started at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The current compensation system allows evacuees to receive additional compensation payments if their evacuation periods are extended. Some critics say evacuees are hoping for a continuation of evacuation orders so that they can receive more money.

But the new plan will terminate compensation payments for the two zones in 2018 without exception. If the evacuation order is lifted five years after the nuclear accident, the evacuees from the area can still receive compensation for two more years, even though they are qualified for only one additional year under the current system.

Adoption of the new plan will make it easier for the government to work out support measures for people who return to their hometowns in the two zones, the sources said.

"The lifting of evacuation orders will proceed," a government official said. "We will be able to construct houses and attract plants and firms (to the areas) more positively."

However, it is not clear whether radiation levels will drop as expected by March 2018.

Even if evacuation orders remain in place because of delays in decontamination work, the compensation payments will still end in 2018 for the two zones, the sources said.

(This article was written by Nobuyoshi Nakamura and Noriyoshi Otsuki, a senior staff writer.)

Rice (for sale?) grown in Namie

May 18, 2015

Rice for sale test-grown near Fukushima plant

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150518_32.html

May 18, 2015 - Updated 13:38 UTC+2

An experiment started on Monday to grow rice for sale in paddies in the town of Namie near the disabled Fukushima nuclear power plant.

All residents of Namie continue their evacuation from the town since the nuclear accident in March of 2011.

Seedlings were planted by about 20 people, including local farmers and Namie Mayor Tamotsu Baba, in paddies in a district of Sakata. The area is still designated as an evacuation zone.

Rice that was not for shipment was grown in the same paddies last year for the first time since the nuclear accident. Since the radiation levels of the rice harvested from the paddies were within permissible levels, the rice was cooked and served at cafeterias in government buildings in Tokyo.

Namie Town officials say rice will be planted in 1.3 hectares of land this year. If the radioactivity level of the expected harvest is below permissible levels, the town, in cooperation with an agricultural cooperative, will consider selling the rice.

The initiative comes as town officials aim to have the government lift its evacuation order in March of 2017.

They hope the local farmers can begin growing full crops by then, and that this will lead to the residents returning home.

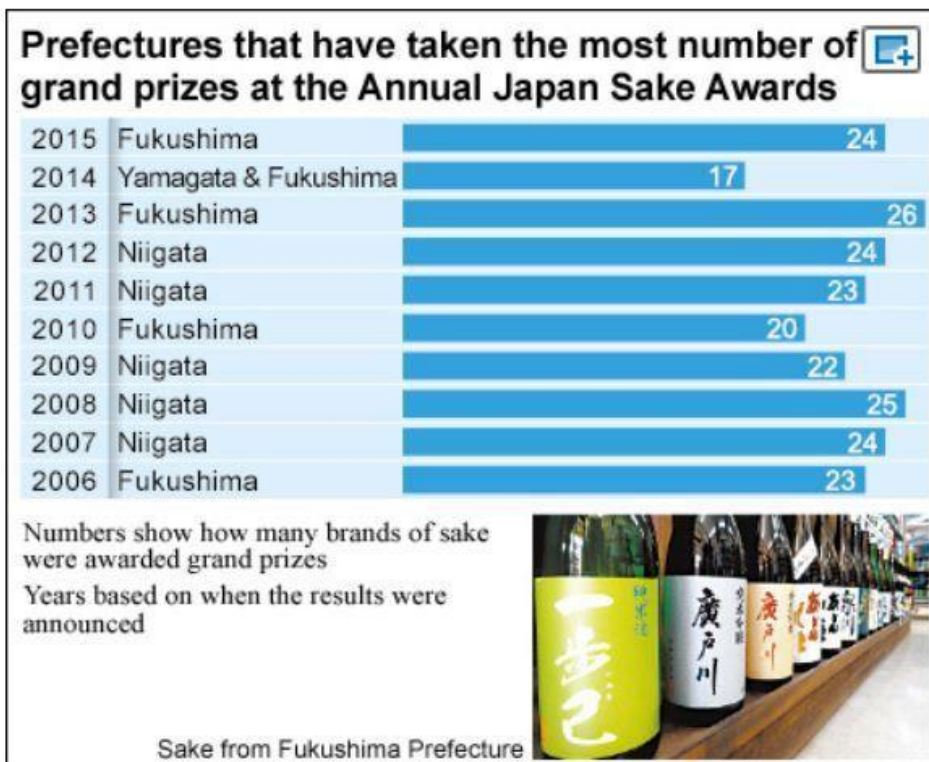
Mayor Baba said he believes accelerated efforts to decontaminate Namie will lead to a resumption of the local farming industry. He expressed his readiness to prepare to sell rice this year, despite rumors and consumer worries about agricultural products from Fukushima.

Sake awards for Fukushima

May 21, 2015

Fukushima again tops in grand prizes at sake competition

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201505210095>



Fukushima Prefecture won the most grand prizes at the Annual Japan Sake Awards for the third straight year, lifting the spirits of brewers still struggling with the effects of the nuclear accident there.

Twenty-four of the 222 brands awarded grand prizes came from breweries in the disaster-hit prefecture in the northeastern Tohoku region, organizers of the 2015 competition announced on May 20. In second place were Yamagata and Niigata prefectures, with 15 grand prizes each.

“Producers in Fukushima are determined to overcome the adversity of the nuclear accident, thinking, ‘We shall make a good product,’” said Kenji Hiroki, 48, who runs the Hiroki Shuzo Honten in Aizu-Bange, Fukushima Prefecture. “I’m happy because I believe this means that the quality of Fukushima products was praised highly.”

His “Hiroki” brand won a grand prize.

The annual competition is organized by the National Research Institute of Brewing (NRIB) and the Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association. Sake breweries from across the nation submit their new brews of undiluted “ginjo-shu” (sake made with highly polished rice) produced in July of the previous year and onward.

Twenty-four people, including National Tax Agency directors in charge of brewing technology, judged the quality of each brand. The winners are not ranked.

For the full list of grand prize winners, visit the NRIB website (<http://www.nrrib.go.jp/English>).

Yutaka Hoshide with Nagasaki opera in Tokyo

May 24, 2015

Nagasaki atomic bombing-themed opera coming to Tokyo

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/features/news/20150524p2a00m0et004000c.html>

Japan Opera Foundation conductor Yutaka Hoshide is looking forward to picking up his baton in July when he will direct an atomic bombing-themed opera written by the Nagasaki Opera Association, as the country commemorates the 70th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki this summer.

"As a member of the generation that was born during World War II, I want to express the meaning of peace through opera as a composite art," the 73-year-old conductor told the Mainichi Shimbun about the theatrical program "Inochi" (life) in which he has taken multiple roles, from writing script to taking up roles as artistic and technical director.

The opera, which features an A-bomb survivor nurse in Nagasaki in a three-act structure, will be played at New National Theatre in Tokyo's Shibuya Ward on July 25 and 26. The theater invites successful theatrical performances from across the country and has a joint showcase every one or two years.

Hoshide was born in Tokyo and completed courses on opera at the predecessor of Showa University of Music. He then moved to Germany in 1969 and served as vice conductor at the Nuremberg State Theater. While continuing his musical performances in European nations, including former East and West Germany, Hoshide moved the main base of his career to Japan and has been mentoring local opera companies in the country.

He's worked with the Nagasaki Opera Association for 30 years. It took Hoshide and the opera company over 10 years to complete "Inochi," whose music was composed by Kayoko Nishiki. The script for the program was written based on personal notes by A-bomb survivors and interviews with them.

"There isn't a single line in scenes of the bombing that I made up," Hoshide explains.

The opera was first played in Nagasaki two years ago, and then in Mie Prefecture. The performance in Tokyo, which will be its third showcase, will feature 40 members in an orchestra with some 80 performers from children as young as third-graders to those in their 70s. Most of the performing members are second or third generations of A-bomb survivors with different backgrounds -- some are music teachers, graduates of music schools and some used to sing in glee clubs. Members include A-bomb survivors as well.

Hoshide added, "Nagasaki is a city of prayers where bells from churches and temples ring at the same time. We'll perform to convey the value of life through the city's historical background and the ways characters in the opera choose to live."

Evacuees' skepticism

May 22, 2015

Nuclear disaster evacuees voice doubts about LDP recovery plan



Evacuee Miyoko Matsumoto sits down in a temporary dwelling in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, on May 21, 2015. (Mainichi)

拡大写真

Evacuees of the Fukushima nuclear disaster have voiced skepticism over a Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) plan to lift evacuation recommendations for all but the most heavily contaminated areas by March 2017, questioning whether decontamination will have advanced sufficiently by then.

The plan would lift evacuation recommendations for all areas except those with the most severe designation by March 2017. Compensation for emotional stress of 100,000 yen per month per resident would continue to be paid across the board until one year after that.

Naraha, Fukushima Prefecture, could have its evacuation recommendation lifted as early as this summer. Under the current system, compensation to its residents would end next summer, but if the LDP plan is adopted, compensation would be extended for as long as a year and a half.

Miyoko Matsumoto, 84, who evacuated from Naraha to adjacent Iwaki, lives alone in temporary housing.

"I am glad that the compensation will be extended, but money is not the only reason that I cannot go back," she says.

While she wants to return to her hometown, her home there was badly damaged in the Great East Japan Earthquake and needs to be rebuilt. However, with construction workers busy rebuilding the area, she doesn't know when her turn will come. She adds, "If the neighbors don't come back with me, I won't be able to live there, as my legs and back are weak."

Another evacuee, Fumitaka Kanazawa, 58, fled with his family from the town of Namie to the city of Fukushima.

"Will the evacuation recommendation really be lifted by March 2017?" he asked doubtfully.

Under the decontamination plan for Namie, removal of radioactive materials is scheduled to be completed by March 2017, but that is three years behind the initial schedule.

"They probably timed the lifting of evacuation recommendations and the end of compensation payments to lessen the financial burden on Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO)," he says.

The LDP plan states that "for the two years through the end of next fiscal year, the national government will guide TEPCO into providing proper compensation" for businesses and industries affected by the nuclear disaster. For the period after that, however, it only states, "We will react appropriately according to individual circumstances."

Mikiko Matsumoto, 64, used to run a craft store with her family in the village of Katsurao, which is also subject to an evacuation recommendation. The business had continued for over 100 years.

"Now I am getting by on compensation payments, but what will I do if they end?" she asks. Although she wants to reopen her store in the old location, there will likely only be a limited number of residents who return to the village.

"I can't receive compensation forever, but it is obvious that sales will be lower than before the disaster," she says.

Katsurao Mayor Masahide Matsumoto comments, "Not everyone will come back, so many people will see fewer sales than before if they resume business here. Support will be needed for some time even after residents return."

Premature lifting of evacuation orders

May 22, 2015

LDP wants to let evacuees move back to areas tainted with 50 millisieverts or less by March 2017

JJI

A team from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party is requesting that Fukushima's nuclear evacuees be allowed to return to parts of the prefecture **where the annual radiation dose is 50 millisieverts or less by March 2017.**

The proposal to prematurely lift the nuclear evacuation orders was made Thursday by the LDP's Headquarters for Accelerating Reconstruction after the Great East Japan Earthquake. The conservative party will submit this and other related measures to its leader, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, later this month after consulting with coalition partner Komeito.

The LDP's proposal covers two of the three restricted areas around the Fukushima No. 1 power plant, which tainted much of the prefecture during the three core meltdowns triggered by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

One of the areas has an estimated annual radiation dose of 20 millisieverts or less. It has been designated as an area where residents can prepare for evacuation orders to be lifted.

The other has an estimated annual radiation dose of between 20 and 50 millisieverts.

The 55,000 or so registered residents in the two areas are only allowed entry for a handful of activities, including short visits and business.

The third restricted area, which won't see its evacuation status lifted by March 2017, is the most heavily polluted and is estimated to have an annual radiation dose beyond 50 millisieverts. The area, which has about 22,000 registered residents, remains a no-go zone.

The LDP team said the government should take steps to pave the way for a smooth transition in the two less-polluted areas by **accelerating decontamination work and rebuilding infrastructure**.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. is paying ¥100,000 in consolation money to each displaced resident in the two areas every month. **The payments are to be terminated one year after the evacuation orders are lifted.**

The LDP team proposed that Tepco continue making the payments until March 2018, regardless of when the evacuation orders are lifted for the two areas.

Last year, Japan lifted evacuation orders in parts of Tamura and the village of Kawauchi that had been included in the least-polluted of the three areas. The proposed uniform expiration rules for the consolation payments should also apply to Tamura and Kawauchi residents, said key headquarters official Shinji Inoue, former state minister of the environment.

The LDP team also said the two years through fiscal 2016 should be designated as a period of intensive assistance to help residents restore their independence in their hometowns.

The government should create a new assistance organization for that purpose, the team said, urging the government to instruct Tepco to compensate a wider range of businesses damaged by the nuclear disaster.

The team also said disaster-affected municipalities should cover a portion of the costs for some reconstruction projects. **So far, the central government, which had placed responsibility for both promoting nuclear energy and overseeing the industry under the same ministry for decades, has been footing the entire bill.**

"Voice our pain"

May 25, 2015

Nationwide Fukushima nuclear disaster victim committee aims to 'voice pain'

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150525p2a00m0na005000c.html>

NIHONMATSU, Fukushima -- A committee comprised of nationwide groups of victims from the disaster at the Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO)'s Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant -- the first such umbrella organization in the country -- held its inaugural meeting here on May 24, drawing some 300 participants from across Japan.

Members of the liaison committee include groups of plaintiffs seeking redress via legal action, as well as citizens who lodged complaints with the government's Nuclear Damage Compensation Dispute Resolution Center via the process of alternative dispute resolution (ADR). In all, it includes a total of some 23,000 members from 13 separate organizations across the country, spanning the region from Miyagi to Okayama prefectures.

Plaintiff groups and other conference attendees expressed criticism regarding post-disaster handling on the part of both the national government and TEPCO.

"Lifting the evacuation orders for restricted areas and terminating compensation payments, despite the fact that the physical effects from radiation remain unknown, constitutes irresponsibility," commented Chikage Kanno, 50, a member of a plaintiff group from Kyoto Prefecture that is seeking court damages stemming from the nuclear disaster.

"The psychological wounds that we have endured remain invisible -- just as with radiation," said Ai Otsuka, 41, from a plaintiff group in Okayama Prefecture. "If we don't voice our pain, the damages that have occurred (as a result of this disaster) will not be understood in their entirety."

May 24, 2015

People affected by Fukushima accident launch group

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

May 24, 2015 - Updated 15:06 UTC+2

More than 20,000 people affected by the 2011 nuclear accident in Fukushima have set up an association to demand an apology and full compensation from Tokyo Electric Power Company and the national government.

They include members of the 12 organizations suing the utility and the government as well as people who had been acting individually.

About 300 of them met on Sunday in Nihonmatsu City, Fukushima Prefecture.

The group aims to join forces, saying that the government is moving towards lifting evacuation orders and cutting compensation while local residents continue to worry about the ongoing decommissioning of the reactors.

The rally adopted a declaration of organization, which says it will aim to win an apology and full compensation from Tokyo Electric Power Company and the government, and to pursue their criminal responsibility.

Each participant raised a piece of paper on which the words "hold hands" were written, and chanted "We will not give up".

The group's joint representative, Ruiko Muto, said those who suffered from the accident have not been fully compensated. She says they want to make their voices bigger by getting organizations to connect with each other.

Simply not safe enough: No escape route

May 25, 2015

Editorial: Comprehensive evacuation plans needed ahead of nuke reactor restarts

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20150525p2a00m0na015000c.html>

Shikoku Electric Power Co.'s Ikata Nuclear Power Plant stands at the base of the Sadamisaki Peninsula, a thin finger of land pointing southwest from the island of Shikoku toward Kyushu. Though the plant recently passed Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) safety inspections, opening the way for reactor restarts, its very location is a serious cause for worry. Namely, **everyone living to the west of the plant on the Sadamisaki Peninsula could find themselves without an overland escape route should there be a nuclear accident at Ikata.**

The Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant meltdowns, triggered by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, joined those two natural calamities to produce a three-headed disaster hydra. The nuclear accident response plans drawn up by Ikata plant host Ehime Prefecture and seven nearby municipalities fell outside the scope of the NRA's inspections, and it would be difficult to say they could cope with the kind of multi-disaster scenario seen on 3.11. If the process to bring the Ikata reactors back online goes ahead, it could threaten the safety of the people living close by.

Shikoku Electric submitted an application to the NRA for safety inspections of the Ikata plant's No. 3 reactor in July 2013 -- the same month that new NRA safety standards went into force. The focus of the inspections was the relative likelihood of an earthquake.

The Median Tectonic Line, one of Japan's major active fault zones, runs roughly parallel to the Sadamisaki Peninsula, in waters about 8 kilometers from the Ikata plant. There are also fears that Shikoku could be hit very hard by a major Nankai Trough quake.

At first, Shikoku Electric based its disaster preparedness plan for a hypothetical quake on a 54-kilometer stretch of the Median Tectonic Line in the waters off the nuclear station, but the NRA told the utility to rejig its calculations with a greater emphasis on safety. Shikoku Electric complied, modeling shifts in 480 kilometers of interconnected faults stretching all the way to Kyushu. The estimated shaking from a quake was also revised up from 570 gal (a unit of acceleration) to 650 gal, while the maximum height of a hypothetical tsunami was boosted from about 4 meters to 8.12 meters. The No. 3 reactor passed the NRA inspection under these more stringent conditions.

Some 5,000 people live between the Ikata nuclear plant and the westernmost tip of the Sadamisaki Peninsula. Under Ehime Prefectural and other local government contingency planning, if there was a nuclear accident at the plant, every one of those 5,000 people would be directed to evacuate east past the plant, theoretically before any radioactive substances had escaped. That is, if the accident got very bad very fast and radioactive materials escaped before the evacuation, the residents would see their eastern escape route cut, and would have to be rescued by sea or air.

If, however, it was a major earthquake that caused this accident, tsunami damage could prevent any evacuation by sea. If we added bad weather to this scenario, escape by plane and helicopter would also become problematic. Concerned residents have apparently been voicing their worries to the Ikata Town Hall.

It is the responsibility of local governments to set evacuation plans in case of a nuclear accident. The central government, meanwhile, has pledged to "give full support" to these plans.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has said many times that he will green-light the restarts of reactors that pass NRA safety inspections. That being the case, **creating evacuation plans that really do guarantee the safety of local residents should ultimately be the central government's responsibility.**

However, **if this responsibility is left in the hands of local governments, we cannot support moving ahead with reactor restarts.**

May 25, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

No escape route for 200,000 people

May 26, 2015

Over 2,300 settlements around nuke plants face isolation if earthquake hits

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150525p2a00m0na017000c.html>

More than 2,300 settlements within 30 kilometers from nuclear power plants in Japan are feared to be isolated in the event of a major earthquake and other disasters, affecting some 200,000 residents, it has been learned.

According to the documents compiled by the Cabinet Office, there are a total of 2,318 settlements that are feared to be isolated due to quake-triggered landslides and other factors in municipalities within 30 kilometers of nuclear plants that are required to draw up evacuation plans for nuclear accidents.

While nuclear disasters are feared to be triggered by other calamities such as massive earthquakes, 80 percent of those settlements don't have space for helipads -- raising fears for residents being trapped there. "Local governments should work out evacuation plans with complex disasters in mind," said an expert.

In the wake of the 2004 Niigata Chuetsu Earthquake, in which a large number of settlements were isolated, the Cabinet Office began surveys on the number of communities vulnerable to such isolation due to shutdowns of road and sea traffic following quake, tsunami, wind or flood damage, as well as what countermeasures are in place.

In October 2014, the Cabinet Office released survey results that showed there were a total of 19,160 such settlements in mountainous areas and along coasts across the country. The Mainichi Shimbun requested the disclosure of the names of municipalities hosting those settlements and looked into which municipalities fall within 30 kilometers from nuclear plants and are required to map out evacuation plans under the Basic Act on Disaster Control Measures.

As a result, 93 municipalities -- about 70 percent of the 135 municipalities in 21 prefectures that lie within 30 kilometers from nuclear power stations -- hosted the 2,318 settlements that are feared to be isolated. Among the 207,177 residents in those communities, 9,345 were known to require assistance for evacuation due to old age, disabilities and other reasons.

The government-set guidelines for nuclear emergency responses call for either evacuation or staying indoors in areas within 30 kilometers of nuclear plants in the event of a nuclear disaster depending on the diffusion status of radioactive materials. However, 1,876 of those potentially isolated settlements do not even have spaces that can serve as helipads because the hamlets are situated on slopes or are concentrated on narrow flatland.

Furthermore, there are 1,461 settlements that are not equipped with water reserves at public halls and other shelters that could host evacuees and 1,456 settlements that are without food reserves in the event a nuclear disaster requires residents to stay indoors. Together with settlements for which there were no responses to the survey, more than 90 percent of hamlets were without water or food reserves, respectively.

Among the 93 municipalities that host the potentially isolated 2,318 settlements, 70 percent -- or 67 municipalities -- have mapped out nuclear disaster evacuation plans. With regards to why anti-isolation measures are lacking despite the relatively advanced nuclear evacuation plans in these municipalities, an official with the Takahama Municipal Government in Fukui Prefecture said, "When it comes to evacuating

residents in broader areas using helicopters, we will need help from the national and prefectural governments. There are limits to what the town office can do about it on its own."

The town of Takahama hosts Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Takahama nuclear plant and has drawn up its own nuclear evacuation plan. An official with the Onagawa Municipal Government in Miyagi Prefecture said, "In order to develop and improve shelters and helipads, we will need to receive financial aid from the national and prefectural governments." The town of Onagawa is home to Tohoku Electric Power Co.'s Onagawa nuclear plant and is in the process of formulating a nuclear evacuation plan.

An official in charge of nuclear disaster management at the Cabinet Office commented, "We are aware that possible isolation of communities caused by complex disasters is feared at each nuclear plant. We will look into measures to be taken in the respective regions."

Nationwide network of plaintiffs over disaster

May 26, 2015

Plaintiffs suing over Fukushima nuclear disaster form nationwide network

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201505260003>

By MASAKAZU HONDA/ Staff Writer

NIHONMATSU, Fukushima Prefecture--Ten groups of plaintiffs in lawsuits and other legal actions over the Fukushima nuclear disaster have joined forces to demand compensation and accountability from the government and Tokyo Electric Power Co.

The groups held a liaison conference, called Hidanren (coalition of nuclear accident victims), to mark its establishment in Nihonmatsu, Fukushima Prefecture, on May 24. The network comprises 20,000 people. Ruiko Muto, who heads a group pursuing criminal responsibility of TEPCO and government officials, expressed frustration over the developments since the nation's worst nuclear accident unfolded in March 2011 at TEPCO's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

She called on the groups to work together to press their demands.

"So far, no one has been charged with criminal responsibility," Muto said. "Few (of the affected) are receiving compensation that they agree with, and few have a clear vision of how to rebuild their lives."

She also said evacuees are under growing pressure to return to their homes soon amid a government campaign to label their hometowns as safe.

The goals set by the conference include: having authorities and TEPCO offer an apology and full compensation to the victims; restore the victims' livelihoods and lifestyles; provide medical service coverage; and introduce measures to reduce radiation exposure among residents.

The participants of the conference included a group of plaintiffs from Fukushima Prefecture who fled to Tokyo, Kanagawa, Kyoto and Okayama and other prefectures after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami caused the nuclear disaster. They are demanding compensation.

Also present were plaintiffs from Fukushima municipalities, including Minami-Soma, Kawamata, Iitate and Kawauchi, who are seeking compensation; a group preparing to file a lawsuit in connection with the nuclear disaster; and a group of plaintiffs calling for legal steps to deal with radiation exposure among children.

Toyohiro Akiyama, a former TV journalist and astronaut who was involved in organic farming in Tamura, Fukushima Prefecture, before the nuclear disaster, said little progress has been made in terms of phasing out nuclear power generation because of a lack of imagination on the part of the public. “We should have a wholesale review of people’s way of life in a metropolis,” said Akiyama, 72, professor of agriculture at Kyoto University of Art & Design, who spoke as a supporter of the network. He was alluding to the fact that the Fukushima plant was built to transmit electricity to the Tokyo metropolitan area.

Tsunami wreck kept in memory

May 26, 2015

Gutted tsunami-hit structure to be preserved as memorial

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/quake_tsunami/AJ201505260046



The tsunami-wrecked disaster management center building in Minami-Sanriku, Miyagi Prefecture, will be preserved as a memorial. (Asahi Shimbun file photo)



MINAMI-SANRIKU, Miyagi Prefecture--The skeletal steel frame of a building that stands as a symbol of the devastation caused by the 2011 tsunami disaster is to be preserved as a memorial after all, according to sources.

Mayor Jin Sato is expected to announce in June the town's decision to accept Miyagi Prefecture's proposal that ownership of the gutted building be transferred to the prefectural government so it can conserve the structure.

The three-story disaster management center building withstood towering tsunami but was stripped of everything other than its frame.

The town government had struggled to keep up with maintenance costs while arguments raged over whether to tear down the structure or preserve it as a memorial.

Municipal authorities originally leaned to dismantling it, but had a change of heart because the structure was recognized as a powerful image around the world of the damage caused by the disaster.

The municipality said May 25 it had received 664 suggestions from town residents since April and that 60 percent of those deemed valid were in favor of the proposal. Although the town assembly had adopted a petition to tear down the structure at the earliest possible date, it is expected to go along with the preservation plan.

The disaster management center was 12 meters high and overwhelmed by 15.5-meter-high tsunami, claiming the lives of 43 town officials and others.

While many residents had been calling for conservation of the structure, some families who lost members to the tsunami demanded it be dismantled on grounds the structure was a painful reminder of the tragedy. Elsewhere in Miyagi Prefecture, the No. 18 Kyotoku Maru, a fishing boat that was swept far inland by the tsunami, has been removed from the Kesenuma area where it ended up.

Also, a tourist hotel in Miyako, Iwate Prefecture, whose first and second floors were stripped bare by the tsunami, has been deemed as a symbol of the disaster. Local authorities have decided to conserve the damaged facility as a reminder of the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami it spawned.

Trying to make life better in children's homes

May 31, 2015

Foreign volunteers in Tokyo and Tottori bring cheer to Fukushima children's homes

by Louise George Kittaka

Some 40,000 children in Japan do not live with their families and 90 percent of such youngsters live in children's homes. While these institutions are sometimes called "orphanages," the majority of the children have been removed from the family home for reasons that include parental neglect, abuse or financial issues. In some cases, parents relinquish care of their children voluntarily.

Fostering and adoption are still the exception rather than the norm in Japan, and upon entering a children's home, a child typically stays there until they finish high school at 18. After leaving, they frequently struggle in society, marginalized for having grown up without the opportunities that other people take for granted. This week Lifelines introduces two groups working to make life better for these young people.

Living Dreams

Living Dreams works with children's homes in both Tokyo and Fukushima, enabling and empowering youngsters with experiential learning and information technology. The NPO was started in 2001 by American Patrick Newell and a small group of friends. Newell is also the founder of Tokyo International School, and at a recent benefit for Living Dreams he spoke about his firm belief in giving children tools to help them realize their full potential.

"The challenge for many of these kids is that don't have a dream for their future, or even if they do, they are not sure how to reach it," he says.

Living Dreams has been running summer arts camps for children in Tokyo for the past seven years. After the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011, the group realized there was a need to help children in Tohoku, and reached out to several homes in Fukushima Prefecture. Since the logistics made bringing the children to Tokyo for the summer camps too difficult, the current director, Michael Clemons, and his team explored other avenues.

The result was the Digital Natives program, which aims to put a computer in the hands of every child in the homes. In a society where most youngsters are media savvy, only 5 percent of those in children's homes have access to computers and the Internet. This holds them back in many ways.

"These children don't have ready access to information and that can have a major impact on their future. For example, they can't do research on education opportunities," says Satoshi Hayakawa, director of the Kodomo no Ie, one of the children's homes in Tokyo working with Living Dreams. "They tend to think they have to get a job when they leave the home, not realizing there are other options."

While around half of Japanese high school graduates go on to university, a mere 9 percent of those coming from children's homes do.

Since 2013 Living Dreams has been partnering with corporate sponsors to not only bring computers to children in Tokyo and Fukushima, but also to provide detailed instruction on how to get the most out of the devices.

Getting the computers into the hands of the children has not been without challenges. Already very busy caring for the children and not always technologically savvy themselves, staff at the homes are sometimes reluctant to expose their charges to computers, fearing difficulties with monitoring their use.

Lois Kawashima, one of the NPO's core members, liaises with some of the homes in Tokyo. She notes that helping the staff to feel comfortable with bringing in the computers is crucial to the success of the Digital Natives program.

"We are helping to bring them into the digital age," she says. "We want every child to be all that they can be."

Cheer for Fukushima

At the other end of country in Tottori, a group of young people is working to raise funds for the Iwaki Ikueisha children's home in Fukushima. Having sustained damage in the 2011 earthquake, the home is being rebuilt and is in need of funds. The Cheer for Fukushima campaign is bringing together the international community of Tottori in a spirit of caring and sharing.

The main movers and shakers are foreign nationals working in local schools as assistant language teachers on the JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) program. At a gathering for JETs last January, anyone interested in participating in a fund-raising event was invited to share their skills.

Cheer for Fukushima was founded by Matt Rogers, a Briton, and fellow ALT Rena Yamasaki from Canada. "More than 30 people from different countries put their names down. We stayed in regular contact with them and upon finalizing our plans, we allocated each person to their roles. We also had extra help from members of an English club at a local high school," says Rogers.

At the end of last month, Cheer for Fukushima held a day of international culture, which included food and craft booths from various countries and a wide range of performers of all ages. Rogers reports that the many volunteers, sponsors and performers worked tirelessly to make the event a resounding success. Every group in Japan needs a mascot, and Cheer for Fukushima has Mirai-chan, a smiling paper fan. Rogers says that one of the best things about organizing the event was being able to inspire a provincial city like Tottori to do something for Fukushima through international culture, and he encourages other foreign nationals to follow suit.

“It’s important to have an idea about what you want to do and why. Contacting your local international organization for their advice on your plans would be a good first move,” he suggests. “There is no better feeling than seeing an idea come to life which brings together your local community to raise money for a great cause, in the country you have adopted as home.”

Living Dreams: www.livingdreams.jp; Cheer For Fukushima: www.cheer4fukushima.wix.com/c4f15.

Online donations for Iwaki Ikueisha children’s home can be made at www.youcaring.com/iwakiikueisha.

Louise George Kittaka has been based in Japan since she was 20. In the ensuing years she has survived PTA duty for three kids in the Japanese education system and singing live on the NHK “Nodo Jiman” show, among other things. Your questions and comments: lifelines@japantimes.co.jp

Will South Korea lift the ban?

June 2, 2015

S.Korea agrees to talks over food import ban

Jun. 2, 2015 - Updated 05:53 UTC+2

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150602_20.html

Japan's fisheries minister has expressed hope that South Korea will lift its ban on fishery imports from areas affected by the 2011 nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant.

South Korea has banned all imports of fishery products from 8 Japanese prefectures, including Fukushima, since September 2013.

On Tuesday, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi told reporters that South Korea informed Japan last Friday that it will agree to bilateral talks in Geneva, Switzerland, based on a World Trade Organization agreement. Japan requested the meeting last month.

Hayashi said under the WTO rules, negotiations should start within 30 days of a request.

He added that the government will step up efforts to get South Korea to lift the ban, even as a date for the talks is being arranged.

25% of special disaster facilities not usable after flooding

June 2, 2015

Many disaster-response hospitals at risk of being cut off by flooding

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/06/02/national/many-designated-disaster-hospitals-at-risk-of-being-cut-off-by-flooding/#.VW7NNkbwmos>

Kyodo

More than a quarter of the hospitals designated as special disaster facilities may not be able to accept patients if heavy rain inundates nearby streets, as they have no alternative means of access, according to a new government study.

Of the 676 facilities designated as disaster hospitals as of April last year, 398, or 58.9 percent, said the roads surrounding them could be flooded due to heavy rainfall or tsunami. Of these, 179 facilities, or 26.5 percent of the total, said they have no substitute access.

According to the study, which was released Monday, only 25 of the 179 have taken steps such as setting up heliports or using inflatable boats and amphibious vehicles to accommodate patients in such contingencies, while 154 facilities have yet to take any such measure.

Prefectural governments designate hospitals with disaster medical assistance teams, heliports and inhouse power generators as disaster hospitals to accept patients on a 24-hour basis when disasters occur.

The number of such hospitals was increased from 676 to 694 in April this year.

The results have prompted the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry to call on relevant prefectural governments to consider stepping in.

The ministry launched the study last October after heavy rain inundated a large part of Fukuchiyama, Kyoto Prefecture, in August, leaving no designated disaster hospital in the city able to accept emergency patients for 10 hours.

A fire department official in Fukuchiyama said when more than 2,500 buildings flooded in heavy rain last August, the water level rose faster than expected.

Moreover, the water blocked a road leading to Fukuchiyama City Hospital, which serves as a special disaster facility. Four patients had to be delivered to the hospital on stretchers carried through waist-deep water for a distance of up to 200 meters, the fire department said.

The hospital also suffered from power outages caused by two lightning strikes. Despite switching to an in-house generator, some equipment remained unavailable for use for extended periods.

The flooding also affected staffing. Since workers on duty the following day were unable to reach the site, those already at the hospital had to continue at their posts while grabbing short naps.

As many as 101 hospitals, or almost 15 percent of the total surveyed, said they were unable to estimate the scale of damage resulting from ground liquefaction. Ninety-five blamed that on a lack of hazard maps drawn up by local communities.

Meanwhile, 93, or almost 14 percent of the total, said they could not foresee the efficacy of their fire extinguishing equipment, while 74 hospitals, or almost 11 percent, were unprepared to cope with damage caused by volcanic activity. As many as 62, or 9.2 percent, said they might have difficulty in dealing with damage due to seismic activity.

The study revealed that some hospitals have taken no specific steps even though they made some predictions of impact — and certainly did not consider a major disaster such as flooding or a lower-6 quake on the Japanese seismic scale.

The hospitals are required to conduct seismic strengthening work and must have access to drainage pumps, but some replied that they would need to raise funds for that. Some put it bluntly: They would be unable to cope without outside help.

The ministry guidelines designating hospitals as special disaster facilities do not specify location as a criteria, such as being in an elevated position if the neighborhood is flood-prone.

"It is essential to use hazard maps when estimating damage," said Nobuo Fuke, head of Teikyo University Chiba Medical Center's Intensive Care Center.

Meanwhile, recent disasters have boosted risk awareness among hospitals and local communities.

Authorities in Hyogo Prefecture revised guidelines in March 2014 that had been drafted in the wake of the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake. And the Aichi Prefectural Government urged all medical institutions in the prefecture to establish a network enabling the exchange of information about bed availability.

Fukuchiyama City Hospital has issued a request to municipal and other authorities to increase the number of drainage pumps available for use in the event of flooding after heavy rainfall.

The hospital said it has also updated its electrical facilities so that they can power heavy equipment with in-house generators in the event of an emergency.

The biggest problem remains a shortage of funds.

"Local communities should share information about possible risks with hospitals and consider securing a budget for emergencies. But it is also important to establish a safety net among local hospitals," said a health ministry official.

Disaster-hit municipalities will have to pay 1 to 3.3% of reconstruction costs

June 4, 2015

Gov't to have disaster-hit municipalities shoulder 30 billion yen in reconstruction costs

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150604p2a00m0na016000c.html>

The Reconstruction Agency announced a plan on June 3 to have municipalities in regions hit by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake shoulder between 1 to 3.3 percent of total costs of reconstruction projects.

Under the plan, the three disaster-stricken prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima are expected to shoulder a combined total of slightly less than 30 billion yen. While calling on the disaster-hit municipalities to foot some of the reconstruction bill out of consideration of fairness in light of other disasters such as the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake, the central government emphasized that it had given consideration to the disaster-stricken municipalities. Nevertheless, progress on work to rebuild the three disaster-hit prefectures remains patchy and some of the municipalities are turning their back on the government's plan to have the disaster-hit regions shoulder reconstruction costs across the board.

Shunsuke Ishimori, a 28-year-old fisherman in the Kobuchihama district on the Oshika Peninsula in the Miyagi Prefecture city of Ishinomaki, which is close to the epicenter of the Great East Japan Earthquake, lamented over the government's plan. While repairing rafts for culturing "wakame" seaweed on the nearby quay on June 3, Ishimori said, "This beach is so far from recovering that we can't even talk about 'reconstruction.' We want the central government and the municipal government to increase assistance."

Other concerns have been voiced among people in municipalities that were severely damaged by the triple disaster and are lagging behind in reconstruction efforts.

The Kobuchihama district, which is active in fishing operations such as culturing "wakame" seaweed and catching conger eels, was hit by tsunami at least seven meters high. Ishimori said the district suffered catastrophic damage and his parents' home was "washed away completely by a wave taller than its roof." The land in the district sank at least one meter so that waterways in the area become flooded when it rains or the tide surges and the area between restored roads and the fishing port often gets flooded like a lake.

The Ishinomaki Municipal Government plans to elevate the land at 75 locations in fishing villages scattered near the fishing port on the peninsula. It will cost a total of between 10 billion yen and 14 billion yen, and the central government said that the municipal government should shoulder 1 percent of the total under the new plan. It will take several years to complete the land-elevating project. The municipal government is expected to shoulder an extra total of about 1 billion yen for projects including one to build and improve escape roads in the city. Ishinomaki Mayor Hiroshi Kameyama said he would urge the central government to continue to fully foot the bill for projects such as one to elevate the subsided land. He said, "It is regrettable (that we should shoulder an extra burden) as we are at a crucial stage of restoration and reconstruction."

In Fukushima Prefecture, there are a total of 141 roads that are supposed to be constructed or improved, including those on which construction work has yet to begin, under the prefecture's project fully financed by the central government's subsidies from a special account for reconstruction. The Reconstruction Agency plans to transfer the project for roads on the west side of the Tohoku Expressway to a general account and to ask the local government to shoulder nearly 40 percent of the total cost covering 31 roads. The central government estimates that local governments in Fukushima Prefecture will shoulder a total of about 10 billion yen. But as a result of the road projects being transferred to a general account, the Fukushima Prefectural Government estimates the total extra financial burden to reach about 26 billion yen over a five-year period. Fukushima Gov. Masao Uchibori bitterly criticized the national government, saying, "The government's thinking at this point in time is clearly different from our own."

Miyagi Gov. Yoshihiro Murai, on the other hand, said, "Reconstruction will move forward steadily (thanks to the national government plan). The government made a lot of efforts for us." Iwate Gov. Takuya Tasso also said, "It is regrettable that the central government did not change its plan to increase some of the extra burdens (on local governments), but I think the government gave considerations to local governments that are in severe financial status."

Because it was initially thought that the three disaster prefectures would have to shoulder a combined total of 100 billion yen, the government plan provided a breathing space for the local governments as the total financial burden was slashed to slightly less than 30 billion yen.

Yoshimitsu Shiozaki, professor at Ritsumeikan University, said, "The government will terminate the intensive reconstruction period after five years of its own accord, and it has nothing to do with progress in reconstruction work in disaster-hit municipalities. For those municipalities that had little financial strength from the outset, shouldering even 1 percent is a huge burden and it is possible that the municipalities will back away and become unable to carry out their initially-planned reconstruction projects. Because there are differences in financial strength among municipalities, it is not fair to impose a burden on them across the board."

June 04, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Fallout still Japan's major problem

June 5, 2015

Report: Nuclear fallout top environmental problem

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150606_04.html

Jun. 5, 2015 - Updated 20:17 UTC+2

A Japanese government report says the release of massive amounts of radioactive materials is still the country's top environmental problem 4 years after the nuclear accident in Fukushima Prefecture.

This year's white paper on the environment says high levels of radiation are still detected in some areas. It says affected areas face a number of problems, such as depopulation and ungrounded rumors.

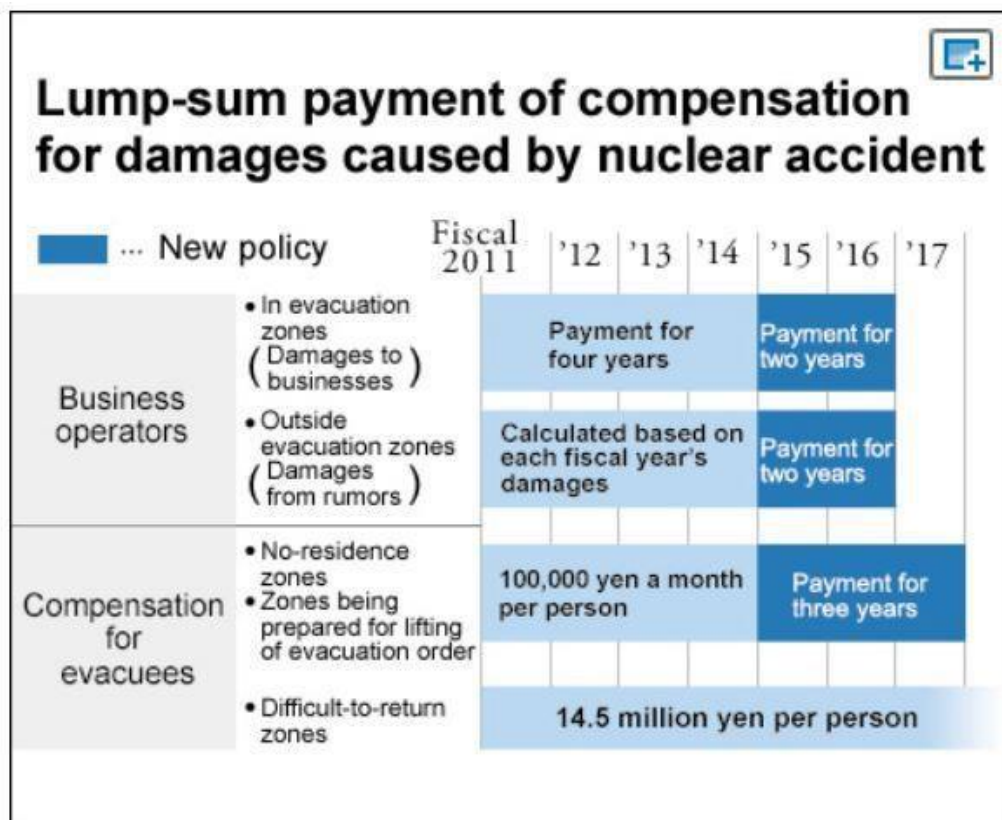
The report calls for the introduction of renewable energy in such areas. It proposes using part of earnings from green energy generation to help residents to return to their communities.

Compensation to businesses to stop in 2016

June 7, 2015

Compensation to Fukushima businesses hurt by nuke accident to end in fiscal 2016

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201506070028>



The Asahi Shimbun

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Six years after the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the government and Tokyo Electric Power Co. plan to pull the plug on compensation to business operators for losses they incurred due to the forced evacuation.

The plan will be included in a new compensation policy to be worked out as early as this month. Though the new policy also will include support measures for reconstruction of the businesses, the termination of compensation payments will likely be met with a backlash from business owners who have halted operations or suffered a decline in revenues.

The total compensation TEPCO paid to individuals or businesses due to the nuclear accident in March 2011 stood at nearly 5 trillion yen (about \$39.8 billion) as of the end of April. Under the new plan, the total amount is likely to be kept below 6 trillion yen.

About 8,000 business operators have evacuated from the evacuation zones. They have received compensation for financial damages they have suffered for the four years until fiscal 2014, which ended in March 2015.

Under the new policy, they will also receive compensation for an additional two years that will continue until fiscal 2016. However, the lump-sum compensation payments will end then.

Business operators outside the evacuation zones have also received compensation if they have suffered financial damages due to rumors of radioactive contamination. The operators have included those operating tourism-related companies or food processing firms.

Until fiscal 2014, they have received compensation based on the financial damages they have incurred in each fiscal year. The annual amount of compensation has been calculated by subtracting the profits of each fiscal year from those of the pre-nuclear accident year.

Under the new policy, they will receive compensation for the additional two years in a lump-sum payment. The amount of the compensation will be calculated based on the gap between the profits of fiscal 2014 and those of the pre-nuclear accident year.

Before the termination of compensation payments, the government and the private sector will jointly set up an organization to support business operators to reconstruct their operations, change their businesses or find new jobs for them or their employees.

The government will start discussions with economic organizations in Fukushima Prefecture later this month for the establishment of the new organization.

Compensation payments to farmers, fishermen and workers engaged in forestry are expected to continue even after fiscal 2016.

As for compensation payments to evacuees, 14.5 million yen has been paid to each evacuee from the difficult-to-return zones where radiation levels remain high. In the non-residence zones and the zones being prepared for lifting of the evacuation order, 100,000 yen has been paid to each evacuee per month. The monthly payments will be terminated in March 2018, which is the end of fiscal 2017. At the conclusion, each evacuee in non-residence zones and zones being prepared for the lifting of the evacuation order will have received a total of 8.4 million yen for the seven-year period from fiscal 2011 to fiscal 2017.

June 7, 2015

Blanket compensation for meltdown-hit businesses to end by fiscal 2017: Tepco

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/06/07/national/blanket-compensation-for-meltdown-hit-businesses-to-end-by-fiscal-2017-tepco/#.VXRfSubwmot>

JJI

Tokyo Electric Power Co. said Sunday it will stop making blanket compensation payments to small and midsize companies in Fukushima that were damaged by the triple core meltdown at its Fukushima No. 1 power plant in March 2011.

Tepco, as the utility is known, will terminate the payments at the end of fiscal 2016, in March 2017.

Tepco will finish compensating businesses for their losses by determining compensation amounts in accordance with damage types, the beleaguered utility announced at a meeting with municipalities and business groups.

For businesses that will remain damaged thereafter, the utility will decide how much to pay on a case-by-case basis, Tepco President Naomi Hirose said.

Meanwhile, many participants said they fear that the utility's loss compensation scheme will disappear completely in two years.

Companies worried about end of compensation

June 8, 2015

Fukushima business owners at a loss over plan to terminate compensation

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201506080034>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Business operators that evacuated after the Fukushima nuclear disaster criticized plans to end compensation payments, citing the destruction of their normal bases of operation and the time needed to attract new clientele.

"It is premature to stop paying compensation," said Ikuo Yamamoto, 56, who used to be a rice dealer in Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture, all of whose residents were forced to evacuate. He currently lives in Iwaki.

The central government and Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, decided to terminate compensation for nuclear-related financial losses in fiscal 2016. About 8,000 business operators that have left areas around the plant have received such payments over the four years until fiscal 2014.

Yosuke Takagi, state minister of economy, and TEPCO President Naomi Hirose explained the new compensation policy to local officials and business owners at a meeting June 7 in Fukushima city. They said the government and TEPCO will pay compensation for an additional two years until fiscal 2016, and then end the lump-sum reparation payments.

They also stressed that **intense support measures to rebuild businesses will be introduced over the coming two years to help affected business operators establish themselves without depending on compensation money.**

However, municipal leaders called on TEPCO and the government to carefully consider the new policy. Okuma Mayor Toshitsuna Watanabe said that business owners who have evacuated from the town must win new customers where they currently reside because most areas of Okuma are still designated in the difficult-to-return zone.

"I hope (the government and TEPCO) will provide generous assistance for reconstruction of local businesses on a case-by-case basis," he said.

All residents of Naraha have also been forced to live outside the town since the nuclear disaster unfolded in March 2011.

Kumiko Hayakawa, 48, said she has yet to decide whether to reopen the beauty salon that she ran with her 74-year-old mother in Naraha, even though the evacuation order for the town is expected to be lifted by year-end.

"It is inappropriate for us to just rely on compensation for so long," Hayakawa said. "But I suspect people may not return to the town, and I cannot make a decision (on restarting the salon)."

Masaki Yatsuhashi, 43, who used to run a bakery in Naraha, opened a bread shop in May in Iwaki, where he now resides.

Although he sold bread at a makeshift store near temporary housing in Iwaki after the nuclear accident, the business was always in the red.

Yatsuhashi said he decided to open a new bakery because he wanted to end his dependence on government assistance.

However, he said the business situation surrounding evacuees will not be completely restored even if Naraha residents are allowed to return to their homes.

"The damages from the disaster will not be repaired just in one or two years," he said.

(This article was written by Takuro Negishi, Mikio Kano and Noriyoshi Otsuki, a senior staff writer.)

June 8, 2015

Gov't, TEPCO plan 2-year lump sum payments for firms in Fukushima evacuated areas

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150608p2a00m0na005000c.html>

The government and Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) disclosed on June 7 that they have informally decided to pay two years' worth of compensation in a lump sum to the operators of businesses in areas that remain under evacuation orders following the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

The government and TEPCO announced that they planned to compensate business operators for the period from March 2015 to February 2017, and then deal with firms on a case-by-case basis after that. They unveiled the measures at a meeting of a prefectural committee handling nuclear-power related damage, formed by the Fukushima Prefectural Government and industrial and commercial bodies in the prefecture.

TEPCO President Naomi Hirose, who attended the meeting, stated that as long as there was continuing damage after March 2017, compensation would be paid.

The new compensation guidelines were based on a suggestion for speeding up recovery of the disaster-hit areas compiled by the ruling coalition in May. At the meeting, TEPCO said the condition for compensation payments from March 2017 onwards would be "being forced to endure ongoing damage due to special circumstances that cannot be avoided." Business representatives criticized this condition over fears that the scope of compensation could be intentionally narrowed. They argued that a wide scope of damages should be covered, and that the procedures for proving that damages resulted from the nuclear disaster should be simplified.

The two-year lump sum payment will be offered to small- and medium-sized businesses with investments or capital of up to 100 million yen, as well as to individual business operators.

The government and TEPCO have also indicated that they will compensate businesses outside areas under evacuation orders whose profits declined in the wake of the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, as a measure against "damage from harmful rumors." They plan to make lump sum payments to these businesses for the period from August 2015 to July 2017, based on factors including recent revenue losses. As with the businesses in evacuated areas, compensation after this period will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

Preserve the pro-nuke signs?

June 8, 2015

Petitioners push to have pro-nuclear signs in evacuated town kept in place

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150608p2a00m0na011000c.html>



A pro-nuclear power sign reading "Nuclear power -- energy for a bright future," is seen in Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture, in February 2014. (Mainichi)

IWAKI, Fukushima -- A man whose slogan was adopted many years ago for a pro-nuclear sign in Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture, delivered a petition on June 8 signed by 6,502 people to have the signboard and others like it kept in place.

The signboards were put in place as part of a campaign to boost enthusiasm for the expansion of reactors at Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. Yuji Onuma, now 39, was a sixth-grader at the time. His phrase, "Nuclear power -- energy for a bright future" was chosen in a public contest for the phrases and used on a sign, put up in 1988 along a national road. Three years later, another sign was put up in front of the town office. Each sign carried slogans on its front and back, for a total of four phrases espousing nuclear energy. The town of Futaba is almost completely off-limits for habitation due to the 2011 disaster at the Fukushima nuclear plant. With town employees unable to perform maintenance on the signs, their metal parts have corroded and the town government was planning to remove them due to the danger of them falling.

Onuma and his wife began collecting signatures for the petition to keep the signs in place, getting signatures from people at anti-nuclear demonstrations around the country and even from abroad. They say that former Prime Minister Naoto Kan even signed the petition. Another supporter was a 90-year-old man who came up with one slogan carried on the sign in front of the town office, reading, "Nuclear energy -- a prosperous future and hometown development."

In March this year, the town assembly approved a budget draft to remove the signboards, after which their preservation would be considered. However, Futaba Mayor Shiro Izawa, after receiving the petition, indicated he would rethink the decision to remove the signs.

"I want to make an overall decision on whether the signs should be preserved in place or removed," he said.

Onuma says, "As an issue for all of Japan, we should leave those signs to show the mistakes of the past to the people of the future."

see also :
June 9, 2015

Slogan writer seeks to keep Fukushima pro-nuclear signboard in place

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/06/09/national/social-issues/slogan-writer-seeks-keep-fukushima-pro-nuclear-signboard-place/#.VXcUdUbwmos>

JJI

IWAKI, FUKUSHIMA PREF. – The man who as a young student coined a rosy slogan promoting nuclear energy in Fukushima Prefecture that was splashed on a prominent signboard near the Fukushima No. 1 power plant has submitted some 6,500 signatures to the local government to keep it in place.[...]

Does Govt. want to force evacuees to go back?

June 9, 2015

Plan to end rent subsidies for some Fukushima evacuees under fresh fire

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150609p2a00m0na006000c.html>

A plan to end rent subsidies for some evacuees from the Fukushima nuclear disaster has come under fresh fire, as it emerged that **those subsidies are costing at most 8.09 billion yen this fiscal year.**

The evacuees under consideration for having their subsidies cut -- at the end of fiscal 2016 -- are voluntary evacuees living in homes other than temporary housing structures built for evacuees. The total Fukushima Prefecture relief budget for disaster evacuees this fiscal year, including non-voluntary evacuees, is over 28.8 billion yen, so the subsidies being considered for being cut account for less than 30 percent of the relief budget.

One expert knowledgeable about evacuees says, "The reason that a plan to end these subsidies has arisen even though the financial burden is not large **may be that government officials want to try and force voluntary evacuees to return to their homes, without respecting evacuees' own judgments on the matter.**"

Voluntary evacuees are people who evacuated from areas outside of those where the government ordered evacuations. Until November 2012, Fukushima Prefecture did not allow them to use emergency temporary housing set up for evacuees in the prefecture, and many voluntary evacuees moved outside of the prefecture.

According to the Fukushima Prefectural Government, for this fiscal year it allocated about 20.73 billion yen for the temporary homes of non-voluntary evacuees within the prefecture, and 8.09 billion yen for those of evacuees outside the prefecture. The evacuees outside the prefecture include non-voluntary evacuees, but the exact numbers are not known. A Fukushima Prefectural Government official says, "Non-

voluntary evacuees have been using compensation for their lost real-estate to buy homes, and most of the people getting rent subsidies outside of Fukushima Prefecture are probably voluntary evacuees."

Within the prefecture, voluntary evacuees live in around 300 homes, which are not temporary housing structures, but subsidies for their rent are included in the "out-of-prefecture" budget, so the 8.09 billion yen covers all voluntary evacuees from the prefecture.

According to the Cabinet Office, as of April 1 this year, there were evacuees living in 18,742 homes in Fukushima Prefecture other than temporary housing structures, and according to the Fukushima Prefectural Government, evacuees were living in around 10,000 such homes outside of the prefecture. Both numbers include voluntary and non-voluntary evacuees. Neither the Fukushima Prefectural Government nor the central government has yet released exact figures on the number of homes for voluntary evacuees other than temporary housing built after the disaster, nor have they released exact numbers for the total rent paid for them.

Currently, evacuee homes are set to be subsidized until the end of March 2016, with a decision on whether to extend this to be made soon after discussions between the Fukushima Prefectural Government and the Cabinet Office. A plan to end subsidies for voluntary evacuees would extend the deadline for one more year, to the end of March 2017, after which voluntary evacuees would no longer receive them. Although Fukushima Prefecture has money budgeted for subsidizing voluntary evacuees, this money is in effect all paid for by the central government. Tokyo Electric Power Co. has expressed reluctance to pay for voluntary evacuees' rent, and so far the central government has not billed them for such.

Meanwhile, this fiscal year's Fukushima Prefecture budget for radiation decontamination measures is 64.39 billion yen, up 13.35 billion yen from the previous fiscal year. The Ministry of the Environment released an estimate in December 2013 that the total costs for decontamination and mid-term storage for radioactive waste would be 3.6 trillion yen.

June 09, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

March 2017: End of free housing for voluntary evacuees

June 16, 2015

Fukushima Pref. looking to end free rent for voluntary disaster evacuees in 2017

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150616p2a00m0na015000c.html>

The Fukushima Prefectural Government, aiming to encourage residents to return to areas they evacuated after the Fukushima nuclear disaster, announced on June 15 its intention to end free rent for voluntary evacuees in March 2017, while continuing to provide limited support for a time.

Among such evacuees are families living in poverty, and the prefectural government intends to listen to the needs of these families while deciding on the details of its policy.

Many voluntary evacuees are living in private apartments, and their rent is free. Just like with forced evacuees from areas with evacuation orders placed on them, voluntary evacuees have had their free rent extended on a yearly basis, in accordance with the Disaster Relief Act.

At a press conference on June 15, Fukushima Gov. Masao Uchibori said, "The construction of publically-managed recovery homes (for evacuees) has made progress, and it will be difficult to maintain the emergency aid being offered under the Disaster Relief Act."

As replacements for free rent, some measures the prefecture plans to offer evacuees include: financial assistance starting this fiscal year for moving into Fukushima Prefecture; financial rent assistance for low-income evacuees starting in fiscal 2017 and lasting a few years; and preparation of publically-managed homes both in and out of the prefecture for evacuees to move into. The prefecture will seek financial assistance from the national government in order to provide these services.

Starting in July, the prefectural government plans to open consultation meetings in regions with large numbers of voluntary evacuees regarding lifestyle support and returning to evacuated areas.

"We will think of a framework that allows us to respond to everyone's individual wishes. We want to enrich the contents of our support policies," said Gov. Uchibori.

The exact number of voluntary evacuees is unknown, but at the end of last year, the Fukushima Prefectural Government estimated there were 25,000 people, across 9,000 households. Five thousand, across 2,000 households, are believed to be in the prefecture, and 20,000, across 7,000 households, are believed to be outside of the prefecture. This year the Fukushima Prefectural Government and the central government, which pays for the free evacuee rent, have been in talks about how much longer to extend the free rent. Since last month, the prefectural government has been exchanging opinions with municipalities with voluntary evacuees in them. The Fukushima government reached the conclusion that, with radiation decontamination work having moved forward and living conditions in evacuated areas improving, in order to encourage evacuees to move back and become independent it is necessary to end the free rent. The Fukushima Prefectural Government has also decided for now to set the end of the residing period for forced evacuees living in temporary housing structures at March 2017, with what to do after then to be dependent on factors including whether evacuation orders on restricted areas have been lifted.

June 15, 2015

Fukushima to end housing aid for voluntary evacuees

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/06/15/national/fukushima-to-end-housing-aid-for-voluntary-evacuees/#.VX7qZUbwmos>

JJI

FUKUSHIMA – The Fukushima Prefectural Government said Monday it will stop providing free housing at the end of March 2017 to nuclear evacuees whose homes are in official evacuation zones.

Housing assistance to the voluntary evacuees, currently set to expire in March 2016, will be terminated after a one-year extension.

The program was instituted after the 2011 catastrophe at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant forced thousands to flee.

The prefectural government is considering offering financial assistance for home moves, as well as rent subsidies for low-income households, after the end of the free housing program.

Gov. Masao Uchibori said that emergency assistance under the disaster relief law is getting harder to justify after progress in the restoration of infrastructure, contamination work and the construction of public housing.

The prefectural government estimates there are about 25,000 voluntary evacuees, 20,000 of whom are residing outside Fukushima.

The free housing program for voluntary evacuees was originally a two-year measure, but it has been extended annually for a further 12 months.

Housing assistance for those who have evacuated from designated zones will also remain in place through fiscal 2016. The prefecture will consider on an individual basis whether to continue help when evacuation orders are lifted.

For people who lost their houses in the tsunami, Fukushima will discuss an extension for each household after fiscal 2016, depending on the progress of public housing construction.

Tochigi residents seek compensation from TEPCO

June 15, 2015

7,000 Tochigi residents seek compensation over Fukushima nuclear disaster

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/06/15/national/crime-legal/7000-tochigi-residents-seek-compensation-fukushima-nuclear-disaster/#.VX64s0bwmos>

Kyodo

UTSUNOMIYA, TOCHIGI PREF. – Some 7,000 people living in Tochigi Prefecture sought compensation Monday worth ¥1.85 billion through an out-of-court settlement with Tepco over the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

In the first collective appeal by residents who have not been compensated by Tokyo Electric Power Co., 7,128 people from Tochigi, located some 100 km from the crippled plant, argue that they should be eligible for compensation even though they were not living in Fukushima at the time of the 2011 nuclear disaster.

The residents, who were living at the time in Otawara, Nasushiobara, and Nasu are also demanding an apology and the establishment of a fund to pay for decontamination work and health checks, their lawyers said. The combined population of the two cities and town stands at around 218,000.

The appeal was filed Monday with the Nuclear Compensation Dispute Resolution Center under an alternative dispute resolution system that enables quicker settlements with the participation of a third party that has expertise.

Lead lawyer Koji Otani said it is “irrational” to treat his clients differently from the Fukushima residents who decided to evacuate on a voluntary basis and received compensation, as the same amount of radiation was detected in Tochigi.

“We want Tepco to take seriously the fact that over 7,000 people raised their voices,” Otani told a news conference at the Tochigi Prefectural Government office.

The residents are demanding sums ranging from ¥120,000 to ¥720,000 per person — equivalent to the amount awarded for voluntary evacuees in Fukushima — as compensation for mental suffering and extra living expenses caused by the nuclear disaster, according to the lawyers.

More than 30 percent of those seeking compensation were under 18 at the time of the Fukushima meltdowns, or were born afterward, they said.

"I let my (elementary school) child play in the garden without knowing radiation levels immediately after the accident," said Mako Tezuka, 45, one of the residents who filed the appeal.

"Four years later, I still haven't received any explanation or apology from Tepco and I'm only left with worries about the future and health of my child," she said.

7,000-plus Tochigi Pref. residents seek compensation from TEPCO over nuke disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150615p2a00m0na009000c.html>

UTSUNOMIYA -- Over 7,000 people who lived in three Tochigi Prefecture municipalities at the time of the Fukushima nuclear disaster are to file for an out-of-court settlement on June 15 for compensation from Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), it has been learned.

Lawyers for the group announced their intention to file for the settlement at a press conference at the prefectural government office here the same day.

The 7,128 people seeking the compensation lived in the cities of Nasushiobara and Otawara, and the town of Nasu, all located in the north of Tochigi Prefecture. Although they included areas that recorded similar levels of air radiation to those of mid-southern Fukushima Prefecture, they fall outside of the scope of the areas that receive TEPCO's compensation.

The residents are to apply to a government organ for mediation of disputes about nuclear disaster compensation, where they will file for an alternative dispute resolution (ADR), or an out-of-court settlement, with TEPCO.

According to sources including the lawyers for the residents, this is the first time since the Fukushima disaster that residents in areas not covered by TEPCO compensation have filed for an ADR for compensation as a group.

The residents' demands include: compensation for emotional damages of 120,000 yen to 720,000 yen per person plus money for the rise in their living costs; apologies to the plaintiffs; and the establishment of a fund for health surveys and radiation decontamination.

According to numbers from March this year, put together by the residents' lawyers, 18 percent of the residents applying for the ADR are in their 30s, 16 percent are younger than 10, some 14 percent are in their teens, 14 percent are in their 40s, and 13 percent are in their 60s. As can be seen, the predominant ages are those of child-raisers and their children.

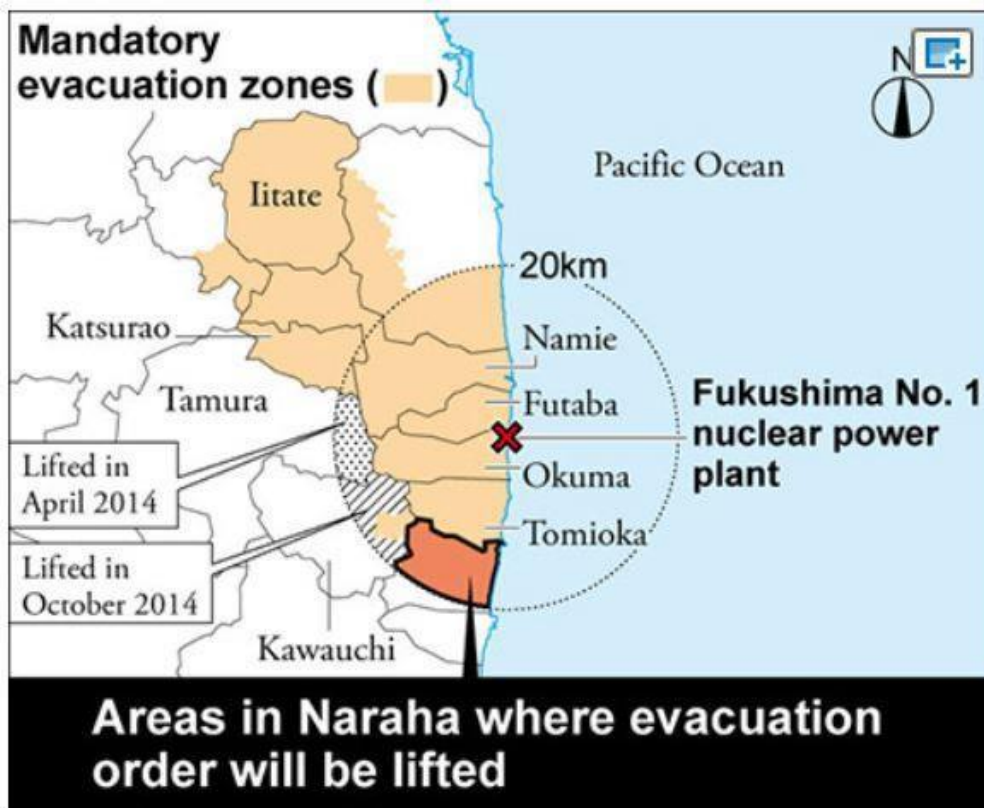
The lawyers also hold that the large number of people participating in the action is testament to how many residents are worried about radiation.

Gov't to lift evacuation order in Nahara

June 17, 2015

Evacuees from Fukushima town get official OK to return home in time for Bon

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201506170090>



The Asahi Shimbun

By AKIFUMI NAGAHASHI/ Staff Writer

IWAKI, Fukushima Prefecture--Residents of the town of Naraha in Fukushima Prefecture will be allowed to return home permanently in early August since being evacuated after the 2011 nuclear disaster, although it's unclear how many will.

The central government said June 17 that it will lift the mandatory evacuation order for Naraha before mid-August.

Town assembly members were informed at their general meeting by government officials that the residents, totaling about 7,400, will be free to return home before the summer's Bon holiday period. "We will proceed with procedures to lift the evacuation order so that residents who are willing to return home can resume their lives in their hometown before the Bon holiday," a government official told assembly members.

After the nuclear disaster unfurled in March 2011, residents were forced to evacuate from seven towns and villages in Fukushima Prefecture and municipal government offices had to relocate. Naraha will be the first among these municipalities to have its evacuation order removed.

A month after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, almost the entire town was designated a no-entry zone, as was all the area extending 20 kilometers in radius from the crippled plant.

In August 2012, the town was redesignated a zone that was being prepared for the lifting of the evacuation order, one of the three categories that is assigned to areas with lower radiation levels.

After progress in decontamination and improvements in infrastructure recovery, the government started a program on April 6 to allow Naraha residents to temporarily stay at home overnight to prepare for their permanent resettlement.

It will organize briefings for local residents to explain the lifting of the evacuation order from June 19.

But less than 10 percent of the 7,400 residents have registered with the temporary-stay program. They have expressed concerns over the slow progress in repair work for private homes and also the radiation levels in their hometown.

And a survey conducted by the Reconstruction Agency last November showed that only 45.7 percent of households in Naraha plan to return home once the evacuation order is lifted.

In the past, the central government has removed mandatory evacuation orders for residents of the Miyakoji district in the city of Tamura and eastern Kawauchi village in Fukushima Prefecture.

Naraha evacuation order to be lifted by mid-August

Jun. 17, 2015 - Updated 09:59 UTC+2

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

The Japanese government plans to lift the evacuation order for a totally deserted town near the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant by mid-August.

Naraha is about 12 kilometers from the troubled plant, at the southern end of the designated evacuation zone. All of the town's approximately 7,400 residents were forced to relocate because of the accident.

Economy and industry state minister Yosuke Takagi made the announcement at a town assembly meeting on Wednesday. Takagi serves as head of the government's local task force on the nuclear disaster.

Takagi said the environment is such that the residents can return and resume their lives. He stressed that residents will not be forced to return, and that they will continue to receive government support.

The townspeople have been allowed temporary stays in their homes since April to prepare for the lifting of the evacuation order. Takagi said this will continue until the order is lifted.

Takagi added the government will hold briefings to address the evacuees' concerns about radiation and the shortage of clinics and other infrastructure.

Barring a setback, Naraha will be the first municipality that was totally emptied after the nuclear accident to have its evacuation order lifted.

Gov't to lift evacuation order for Fukushima Prefecture town of Naraha

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150617p2a00m0na016000c.html>

NARAHARA, Fukushima -- The on-the-spot headquarters of the government's nuclear disaster response task force said here on June 17 that it will lift an evacuation order for the entire town of Naraha in mid-August ahead of the annual "Bon" holiday break.

It will be the third case in which the government lifts a nuclear evacuation order. The government has already lifted evacuation orders for the Miyakoji district of Tamura city and the eastern part of Kawauchi village, both in Fukushima Prefecture. Naraha will be the first among seven towns and villages, which were ordered by the central government to evacuate in their entirety in the wake of the outbreak in March 2011 of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, to have the order lifted.

Yosuke Takagi, who heads the on-the-spot headquarters of the disaster response task force, and other task force officials revealed the plan during a meeting of local town assembly members held at the Naraha Town Assembly hall. They also said the "preparatory lodging" period for which local residents are allowed to return to their hometowns and stay at their original homes to prepare for the lifting of the evacuation order would be extended by about one month from the final day originally set for July 5.

Citing the fact that evacuation orders were lifted for the Miyakoji district of Tamura city and the eastern part of Kawauchi village about three months after their preparatory lodging periods were extended, some Naraha Town Assembly members turned their back on the latest plan, saying it would be "too early" for the evacuation order to be lifted.

The central government emphasized the difference between the case for Naraha and the other two cases in which the local governments and residents started preparatory lodging immediately after the completion of decontamination work. A central government official said, "Naraha has been making preparations to return for more than one year since the central government finished its decontamination work."

According to the on-the-spot headquarters of the disaster response task force, about 10 percent of Naraha's total population of about 7,400 registered for preparatory lodging, and only about 100 of them are actually staying in their homes in the town.

Novelist Yu Miri visits Fukushima students

June 18, 2015

Novelist inspires Fukushima students with candid tales of her troubled past

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201506180010

By MASAKAZU HONDA/ Staff Writer

MINAMI-SOMA, Fukushima Prefecture--When novelist Yu Miri confided that she was expelled from high school for smoking, running away from home and attempting suicide, students listening to her tale were stunned.

"Your teacher was astonished when I told this and said that 'there is no student like you at this high school,'" a smiling Yu said to students at Odaka Technical High School here.

The 47-year-old writer was giving a special Japanese language lesson on June 16 to first-year students at the request of Yoshihide Idogawa, a teacher at the school. Yu became acquainted with Idogawa after she

invited him on a local radio show that she hosts. Yu has been doing the radio show since 2012, a year after the Fukushima nuclear disaster was triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

Yu, who was awarded the prestigious Akutagawa Prize in 1997 for her novel "Kazoku Shinema" (Family cinema), told her life story by way of answering the most common question posed by students: "What inspired you to become a novelist?"

"I am a South Korean national," she told the students. "My parents came from South Korea. Since I was born and raised in Japan, however, I can hardly speak Korean. My name is pronounced as Yu Miri. I was named Miri because my grandfather toiled to find kanji characters that are pronounced the same in both Korean and Japanese."

After her parents were separated, Yu continued, she and her brother followed her mother. Another brother and sister lived with her father.

The high school she attended was a Christian missionary school known for its female students who came from wealthy families. But Yu was a problem student.

After she was kicked out of school when she was 16, she ran away from home again. She joined a theater group in the hopes of becoming an actress after she was mesmerized by a musical she saw in Tokyo's Harajuku district. But Yu later turned to writing plays after she experienced setbacks in her acting career. Taiki Sugioka, one of the students who attended the class, said he was struck by the writer's candid tale.

"I was impressed," said the 15-year-old, who is in the industrial chemistry course. "She is not called a novelist for nothing. She discussed her past candidly and openly."

After she told about her past, some students were asked to tell the class what they like to do the most and what they dislike. They were among the topics she asked them in advance to discuss during the lesson.

She also offered tips on how to compose good sentences.

Yu said she received a good response from the teenagers.

"People age 15 or so are in the most impressionable age group," she said. "I saw in them great earnestness that they do not want to miss anything."

Yu moved to Minami-Soma in April to explore the theme of the displaced, such as many students at the school. The students at the school have been forced to take classes at a makeshift building, away from their school. Radiation levels in the area where their school is located, within 20 kilometers from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, are too high to allow them to continue their education there. Many of the students attend the makeshift school while residing in temporary housing. She is expected to give three more lessons by the end of next March.

Business in evacuation zones

Govt. to allow businesses in evacuation zones

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Jun. 19, 2015 - Updated 15:45 UTC+2

The Japanese government has decided to allow business operations in designated no-entry zones near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. The zones were established following the 2011 nuclear accident.

Businesses essential for rebuilding infrastructure and other post-disaster reconstruction will be allowed to operate in the areas **on certain conditions**.

Some business activities are currently restricted because of high radiation levels in evacuation zones.

The government completed a review of the existing guidelines on Friday. Officials took into consideration the needs of residents and decontamination work that has lowered radiation levels.

Under the revised guidelines, businesses will be allowed to operate in the no-entry zones **if they are certified as indispensable for building infrastructure or waste disposal**.

In restricted residential zones, **growing and distribution of farm produce will be allowed, except for rice, if authorized by the national government and local municipalities**.

Officials of the government's task force say they hope to speed up reconstruction efforts following the revision of the guidelines.

"Smoothing" [evacuees] entrance into public housing"

June 24, 2015

Central gov't wanted voluntary Fukushima evacuees to enter draws for public housing

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150624p2a00m0na009000c.html>

The central government told prefectural governments in October 2013 to **not exempt Fukushima nuclear disaster voluntary evacuees from having to enter draws for access to public housing after the free rent period for their current residences ends**, it has been learned.

Voluntary evacuees are living in regular residences recognized as temporary homes, for which they pay no rent until the end of March 2017. The central government's instruction came in regards to a policy called "Smoothing of (evacuees') entrance into public housing," which is based on an evacuee support law passed in June 2012 under the Democratic Party of Japan administration. The policy is supposed to loosen tough requirements defined by the Act on Public Housing for entrance into local government-run homes, such as income caps, and was included in fundamental policies of the support law that were approved by the Cabinet on Oct. 11, 2013.

The day before the Cabinet decision, the Reconstruction Agency and the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism summoned representatives from the governments of municipalities with many Fukushima evacuees, like those of Tokyo and Saitama and Niigata prefectures, for a meeting. The Mainichi Shimbun obtained minutes of the meeting recorded by multiple municipal governments.

According to the minutes, a representative from the Reconstruction Agency explained that **"basically the policy is for a return to Fukushima"** and then gave details about the support law and the policy, and responded to questions from municipal government representatives.

When representatives from prefectures including Saitama asked about how to handle voluntary evacuees who want to move into public housing after their free rent period for their current residences ends, a ministry representative said the ministry wanted them to not give those evacuees any exemption from having to enter draws for entrance into the housing.

If voluntary evacuees have to enter draws for access to public housing, they might not succeed, and will be stuck without cheap public housing when free rent at their evacuation home runs out.

When a representative asked about the demand among evacuees for the "Smoothing of (evacuees') entrance into public housing" policy, a government representative said, **"The amount of demand is unknown," suggesting that the policy was made without being based on studies of evacuees' desires.**

Many municipalities are restricting application for public housing to evacuees who did not originally live in those areas. A question regarding whether these restrictions needed to be changed came up at the meeting, but a central government representative said, "We don't want changes (to the restrictions)," and asked municipal governments to operate regulations regarding public housing application according to their interpretation.

In June 2014, the land ministry distributed to municipal governments a collection of questions and answers about the policy, indicating strict requirements for allowing voluntary evacuees entrance into public housing without having to enter draws. The questions and answers were not released to the public. The Mainichi Shimbun made an information disclosure request and found that publically released documents on the policy make no mention at all of entering public housing without entering draws. The policy went into effect in October 2014. According to the Reconstruction Agency, 40 prefectural and major city governments are accepting applications for public housing, but due to factors including lack of publicity on the policy, they have only given out 50 applications.

A land ministry representative says, "We cannot treat voluntary evacuees the same as forced evacuees, who are allowed entrance into public housing without entering draws. In the end, the methods taken are the decision of municipal governments."

On June 15, the Fukushima Prefectural Government announced it would consider its own support measures to accompany the end of free rent period for the around 25,000 estimated voluntary evacuees using apartments and the like as temporary evacuation residences.

Young people help elderly refugees

June 25, 2015

Student volunteers move in with elderly 3/11 refugees in Fukushima

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/06/25/national/student-volunteers-move-elderly-311-refugees-fukushima/#.VYvPq0bwmic>

FUKUSHIMA – University students in Fukushima Prefecture have begun providing elderly refugees from the nuclear disaster with a unique form of assistance just by living in the same temporary housing complex where they now live.

By staying close to the seniors and associating with them across generational lines, the young volunteers hope to revitalize their communities.

The aid project was proposed by the Fukushima University Disaster Volunteer Center, which has promoted volunteer visits to temporary housing in the radiation-tainted prefecture. It was adopted by the Reconstruction Agency as a state-subsidized “mental reconstruction” project.

The project involves a temporary housing complex in the Iizaka district in the city of Fukushima where 269 people from the town of Namie, in the exclusion zone near the meltdown-hit Fukushima No. 1 power plant, have taken shelter. About 60 percent of the residents are 60 or older.

Two students will live in the complex for three months, followed by another pair each new quarter, for an entire year. The students will meet the residents and gauge how they are getting by, shop on their behalf and support the activities of the residents’ association.

Last Sunday, about 10 students helped the first two move in, cleaning their dwelling and carrying in furniture.

“Instead of working too hard to fulfill the role of a volunteer, I aim to be accepted as a resident,” Shunichi Sato, a 22-year-old Fukushima University student who volunteered. “I’m looking forward to talking with people who I’ve had few chances to get to know

TEPCO to pay damage to family of suicidee

June 30, 2015

TEPCO told to pay 27 million yen to family of Fukushima evacuee who killed himself

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201506300079>

By YASUO KOJIMA/ Staff Writer

FUKUSHIMA--Tokyo Electric Power Co. has been ordered to pay 27 million yen (\$219,500) in compensation to the bereaved family of a male evacuee who committed suicide after being displaced due to the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Presiding Judge Naoyuki Shiomi of the Fukushima District Court ruled on June 30 that the main reason Kiichi Isozaki, 67, from Namie, near the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, killed himself was “stress related to the nuclear accident.”

It was the second time a court in Japan has deemed that the Fukushima accident was responsible for an evacuee's suicide.

Shiomi ruled that Isozaki lost the “foundation of his life” when he had to evacuate from his hometown, where he had spent most of his life and enjoyed fishing and home gardening after retirement.

The judge concluded that the prolonged evacuation and economic insecurity about his future added to his anxiety and triggered depression.

Isozaki's 66-year-old wife, Eiko, and two other family members sued the utility, demanding 87 million yen in compensation.

Isozaki and his family fled from their home on March 12, 2011, the day after the nuclear crisis unfolded at the plant following the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, according to a court statement.

They took refuge in a shelter set up at a high school gym in Koriyama, also in Fukushima Prefecture, about 60 kilometers from their home, on March 13.

Isozaki complained about being unable to sleep there and also lost his appetite.

About a month later, the family moved to an apartment in Nihonmatsu in the same prefecture.

Isozaki's health began deteriorating again around the middle of June, and he often expressed a desire to return home.

His body was discovered in a river in Iitate, a village in the prefecture, in July. Police believe that he jumped from a nearby bridge.

The central issue of the lawsuit was whether his suicide was related to the nuclear accident.

"Isozaki committed suicide after developing depression while evacuating from the area of the nuclear accident," one of the family members testified in court.

But TEPCO claimed, "Isozaki was already suffering anxiety and stress since he had diabetes."

In the first compensation judgment, the utility was ordered to pay about 49 million yen to the family of an evacuee from Kawamata who killed herself in July 2011. The ruling was made by the same court last August.

The evacuee, 58, had set herself ablaze while on a visit back to her home.

On that occasion the utility decided not to appeal the ruling, and senior TEPCO officials apologized to the family of the deceased.

TEPCO ordered to pay damages over Fukushima-linked suicide

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150630p2g00m0dm070000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA, Japan (Kyodo) -- The operator of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear complex on Tuesday was once again held responsible for a suicide linked to the 2011 nuclear crisis and ordered to pay damages.

The Fukushima District Court ordered Tokyo Electric Power Co. to pay 27 million yen (around \$220,000) to the family of 67-year-old Kiichi Isozaki, who, according to the lawsuit, committed suicide in July 2011 after being forced out of his home near the power station in Fukushima Prefecture and becoming depressed.

It is the second time that a court has determined there was a link between the nuclear disaster and a suicide, and ordered the utility to pay damages.

In the latest ruling, Presiding Judge Naoyuki Shiomi said the severe experiences Isozaki had gone through made him depressed and led to his suicide. But Shiomi said the disaster had a "60 percent" impact on the man's decision to take his own life, given that he had diabetes and that it may also have played a role.

Isozaki's wife Eiko, 66, and two other relatives had sought 87 million yen.

"The ruling aside, I really want TEPCO to apologize," Isozaki's wife said after the ruling.

TEPCO issued a statement saying it will "thoroughly examine the ruling and handle the case sincerely."

According to the lawsuit, Isozaki started having trouble sleeping and lost his appetite after he was evacuated from his home in the town of Namie to a senior high school in Koriyama, Fukushima. Isozaki and his family later moved to an apartment in another city, but his condition did not improve. At dawn on July 23, 2011, Isozaki left his apartment and was found dead near a dam the following day, according to the lawsuit. He had presumably thrown himself off a bridge.

The plaintiffs argued that depression had prompted him to commit suicide and he would be "living happily had the nuclear accident not occurred."

TEPCO, for its part, argued that the court should consider other factors that might have contributed to his mental state.

Last August, the same district court ordered the utility to pay 49 million yen in damages to the family of a 58-year-old woman who burned herself to death after she was forced to evacuate from her home in a Fukushima town contaminated in the nuclear disaster.

Although more than four years has passed since a powerful earthquake and tsunami triggered the country's worst nuclear disaster on March 11, 2011, suicides linked to it continue as more than 100,000 people remain evacuated inside and outside Fukushima.

In Fukushima, 69 suicides committed by the end of May were deemed linked to the earthquake-tsunami or nuclear disaster, according to the Cabinet Office.

See also :

Tepco ordered to pay over suicide linked to nuclear evacuation

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/06/30/national/crime-legal/tepcu-ordered-pay-suicide-linked-nuclear-evacuation/#.VZL050bwmic>

Kyodo

FUKUSHIMA – Tokyo

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"The ruling aside, I really want Tepco to apologize," Eiko Isozaki said after the decision.

Tepco issued a statement saying it will "thoroughly examine the ruling and handle the case sincerely."

According to the lawsuit, Isozaki started having trouble sleeping and lost his appetite after he was evacuated from his home in the town of Namie to a high school in Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture.

Isozaki and his family later moved to an apartment in another city, but his condition did not improve.

At dawn on July 23, 2011, Isozaki left his apartment and was found dead near a dam the following day, according to the lawsuit. He had presumably thrown himself off a bridge.

The plaintiffs argued that depression had prompted him to commit suicide and he would be “living happily had the nuclear accident not occurred.”

Tepco argued that the court should consider other factors that may have contributed to his mental state.

Last August, the same district court ordered the utility to pay ¥49 million in damages to the family of a 58-year-old woman who burned herself to death after she was forced to evacuate from her home in a Fukushima town contaminated by the nuclear disaster.

Although more than four years have passed since the powerful earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011, triggered the country’s worst nuclear crisis, suicides linked to the event continue as more than 100,000 people remain evacuated in and around Fukushima.

Sixty-nine suicides in Fukushima Prefecture committed by the end of May have been deemed linked to the earthquake-tsunami or nuclear disasters, according to the Cabinet Office.

Lifting of Naraha evacuation order delayed

July 6, 2015

Naraha residents allowed to return in September

Jul. 6, 2015 - Updated 12:24 UTC+2

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

The Japanese government has decided to lift in early September its evacuation order for the deserted town of Naraha near the troubled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Economy and industry state minister Yosuke Takagi informed Naraha Mayor Yukiei Matsumoto of the decision on Monday. Takagi serves as head of the government's local task force on the nuclear disaster.

Takagi said lifting the evacuation order on September 5th would meet the expectations of residents who wish to return home. He said it would also help post-disaster rebuilding efforts.

Mayor Matsumoto accepted the government's decision.

The central government had earlier planned to lift the evacuation order by mid-August. But the plan was postponed because residents expressed concerns over radiation and shortages of medical clinics and other infrastructure.

All of the town's approximately 7,400 residents were forced to relocate because of the nuclear accident.

The town is the first municipality totally emptied after the disaster to have its evacuation order lifted.

Gov't to delay lifting of evacuation order for Naraha town to Sept.

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150706p2g00m0dm077000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA, Japan (Kyodo) -- The government said Monday it now plans to lift its evacuation order for the town of Naraha in Fukushima Prefecture on Sept. 5, rather than in mid-August as earlier proposed, after some residents forced to evacuate after the 2011 nuclear disaster said they were not ready to return. Yosuke Takagi, a senior vice industry minister, met with Naraha Mayor Yukiei Matsumoto and conveyed the new plan. It would be first order to evacuate an entire municipality to be lifted.

Most of Naraha, a seaside town with a pre-crisis population of around 7,700, lies within a 20-kilometer radius of Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s radiation-leaking Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station, whose reactors suffered meltdowns after a huge earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

Since April, residents have been allowed to enter the town and stay for days. However, some people have expressed reluctance to return home due to concerns about radiation contamination, among other issues. During the meeting which was open to reporters, the vice industry minister told the mayor that the government will take additional measures to ensure residents' access to medical services and other daily needs to alleviate their concerns.

July 06, 2015 (Mainichi Japan)

Nahara evacuation order to be lifted

July 7, 2015

Evacuation of Fukushima town of Naraha to be lifted Sept. 5

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/07/07/national/evacuation-of-fukushima-town-of-naraha-to-be-lifted-sept-5/#.VZuUpvnwmid>

JJI

- Jul 7, 2015

NARAHARA, FUKUSHIMA PREF. – The central government has notified the town of Naraha, Fukushima Prefecture, it will remove on Sept. 5 the evacuation order that has been in place since the March 2011 nuclear crisis.

Naraha will be the first to see the evacuation order lifted among seven Fukushima municipalities that were completely emptied by evacuation orders.

Government officials, including Yosuke Takagi, state minister of economy, trade and industry, went to the town Monday afternoon and informed its mayor, Yukiei Matsumoto, of the plan to lift the order.

The plan will be formalized soon by the government's Nuclear Emergency Response Headquarters.

The government proposed in June lifting the evacuation order before the Bon holiday period in mid-August. Members of the Naraha Municipal Assembly and other local people objected, arguing the town's infrastructure had not been restored sufficiently.

The government decided to push back the date to allow enough time for additional measures to help smooth residents' permanent return to their homes, such as expanding free shuttle bus services to medical institutions.

The removal of the evacuation order will allow 7,401 people from 2,704 households to return, the largest homecoming of Fukushima evacuees so far. Until now, the biggest returns have been to the Miyakoji district of the city of Tamura and the eastern part of the village of Kawauchi.

Decontamination was completed in Naraha in March 2014. The average radiation level in residential areas in the town was at 0.3 microsievert per hour, down some 60 percent from before the start of the decontamination work.

In April this year, the government started to allow Naraha evacuees to return home for long-term stays to prepare for their permanent return. In total, 688 people from 326 households have taken part in the long-stay program.

Naraha residents can return home Sept. 5 in lifting of evacuation order

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201507070089>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

NARAHARA, Fukushima Prefecture--The people of Naraha, a town that was evacuated after the disaster at the nearby Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, will be allowed to return home Sept. 5, the government said.

It will be the first among seven municipalities to have an evacuation order for all residents lifted since the meltdowns at the plant in March 2011.

The central government notified Naraha officials July 6 that it had fixed the date. Mayor Yukiei Matsumoto accepted the plan, saying the town will help residents resettle.

The removal of the evacuation order is aimed at "accelerating the town's recovery" from the nuclear disaster, said Yosuke Takagi, state minister of economy, trade and industry, during a meeting with Matsumoto.

Takagi, who heads the on-site headquarters of the nuclear disaster response task force, said the government believes that radioactive contamination in the town is "not dangerous enough to continue forcing evacuation on residents who want to return home."

He also pointed out that prolonged evacuation will have a negative impact on residents' health and will deprive the town of recovery opportunities if private businesses are prevented from starting up in the area.

The lifting of the evacuation order for Nahara will be the first case among the seven municipalities in which almost all the residents as well as municipal governments were forced to evacuate.

The majority of the town's 7,400 residents currently live in temporary housing and publicly subsidized apartments in other parts of Fukushima Prefecture or elsewhere. They will be allowed to return home permanently once the evacuation order is removed.

Even after the evacuation order is lifted, residents can remain living in the temporary shelters and other dwellings where they currently reside rent-free until March 2017.

Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the crippled plant, has also pledged to continue paying compensation to all residents until at least March 2018.

On June 17, Takagi had proposed lifting the evacuation order before the Bon holiday period in mid-August, but this plan was opposed by local officials and residents who argued that not enough had been done to restore the town's environment.

The central government pushed back the date to Sept. 5, assessing the government's efforts have met three criteria necessary to lift the evacuation order: lower airborne radiation, improved infrastructure and administrative services, and a sufficient consultation period for residents and the local authority to discuss the situation with central government officials.

(This article was written by Takuro Negishi and Akifumi Nagahashi.)

Nahara residents: Mixed feelings

July 6, 2015

Naraha residents give mixed reaction to govt. plan

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150707_05.html

Jul. 6, 2015 - Updated 19:08 UTC+2

Residents who have been temporarily staying at their homes in Naraha expressed mixed reactions to the government's lifting of the evacuation order in September.

All residents of the town near the troubled Fukushima Daichi nuclear plant were evacuated after the 2011 disaster. They are allowed to visit their homes or stay there temporarily.

An 82-year-old resident visiting her home said she welcomes the lifting of the evacuation order. She said the decision about whether to return should be left to each resident.

Another woman who had been staying at her Naraha home for 4 days said that hospitals, stores and other facilities are still not open. She said it is too early to lift the evacuation order. She also said it is scary at night as no one lives in the houses in her neighborhood.

Haruo Suzuki and his wife returned home in April when the government allowed residents to temporarily stay. The couple said that if the evacuation order is lifted, they can return to a quiet life at home.

Suzuki's wife still buys bottled water for preparing meals and tea because she is concerned about radioactive materials in local water. The couple said they go to a supermarket in Iwaki City once or twice a week to buy meat, vegetables, fish and more. They said shopping is their biggest problem and that they want the issue to be resolved soon.

Reaction of people in Naraha to govt. decision

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150707_04.html

Jul. 6, 2015 - Updated 19:08 UTC+2

Some residents of the town of Naraha near the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant believe the September 5th expiration of the government-ordered evacuation is too early.

All of the town's residents were forced to relocate because of the nuclear accident. On Monday, some of them living in temporary housing in the city of Iwaki in Fukushima Prefecture voiced their concerns.

An 81-year-old man said many houses in the town have not yet been repaired, and the government is irresponsible for making the decision to lift the evacuation order. He said the town has no doctors or shops where residents can buy goods.

A 73-year-old woman said she does not understand why the government is lifting the order as soon as September 5th. She said public housing has not yet been built for people who lost their homes in the March 11th disaster.

A 39-year-old mother of a 9-year-old girl said she is concerned about radiation and the safety of water. She says senior residents without vehicles may have difficulty visiting hospitals.

A man aged 68 says it is hard for him to judge whether the decision is proper, but even if the order is lifted, nothing would change. He says that even after decontamination efforts, there are still some spots with high levels of radiation.

A 75-year-old man said he went to Naraha on Monday and couldn't imagine when reconstruction would be finished. He says he wants to return as soon as the government creates an environment residents can return to without worries.

Mixed feelings in Sendai

July 8, 2015

Local reaction mixed to fuel loading, imminent restart at Sendai nuclear plant



Protesters hold up light-up message boards in front of the Tokyo office of Kyushu Electric Power Co. in Tokyo's Chiyoda Ward on the evening of July 7, 2015. (Mainichi)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150708p2a00m0na013000c.html>

SATSUMASENDAI, Kagoshima -- Kyushu Electric Power Co. started work to load nuclear fuel into the No. 1 reactor at the Sendai Nuclear Power Plant on July 7, sparking mixed reactions among local residents. If the reactor restart at the Sendai plant goes ahead as planned, it will be the first such reactivation under stricter safety requirements adopted after the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant meltdowns in March 2011. About 120 people including local residents gathered in front of the main gate of the Sendai nuclear power complex on the morning of July 7. Holding banners which read, "Loading of nuclear fuel is a step toward accidents," they shouted, "We will never condone reactivation," and, "Kyushu Electric should abandon nuclear reactors."

Kiyoaki Kawabata, 59, who heads a local self-governing body in the Kagoshima Prefecture city of Satsumasendai, was angry that Kyushu Electric had moved ahead with fuel loading without holding a briefing session for local residents.

"Even though residents have been seeking an explanation, they ignored us. We cannot forgive them for that," he said. Hiroshi Sugihara, a 67-year-old part-time lecturer at Kagoshima University, commented, "They should stop work and abandon their (reactor) restart plans."

Seven people from Minamata, Kagoshima Prefecture, about 45 kilometers from the Sendai nuclear station, joined the rally. Takafumi Nagano, the 60-year-old head of a group calling for sound nuclear evacuation plans, said, "We must not allow for the beginning of a new nuclear era." In the 1970s, Nagano lived in what was then Sendai city and joined a campaign opposing construction of the Sendai plant.

Hiroyoshi Yamamoto, who heads a pro-nuclear group in Satsumasendai and the Sendai Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said, "Although the local economy remains in bad shape, I hope that, with the fuel loading, the imminent nuclear plant restart will activate the local economy and stabilize business performance."

Kagoshima Gov. Yuichiro Ito said in a statement, "Because inspections will continue to be carried out before the nuclear plant is put back on line, I would ask Kyushu Electric to continue to place top priority on ensuring safety and take all appropriate measures."

About 200 people opposed to the Sendai restart gathered in front of Kyushu Electric's branch office in the Yurakucho district of Tokyo's Chiyoda Ward on the evening of July 7. The rally was organized by the "Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes."

Holding banners, some of which said: "Don't put in nuclear fuel!" and, "Don't press the start button," the demonstrators chanted slogans including "People can't evacuate!" for about 90 minutes. Protester Yoshimitsu Umezawa, a 62-year-old caregiver from the Tokyo city of Machida, said, "We can't forgive a reactivation which puts priority on the economy and ignores people's lives."

Click here for Japanese article
July 08, 2015 (Mainichi Japan)

July 7, 2015

Naraha residents can return home Sept. 5 in lifting of evacuation order

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201507070089>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

NARAHARA, Fukushima Prefecture--The people of Naraha, a town that was evacuated after the disaster at the nearby Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, will be allowed to return home Sept. 5, the government said.

It will be the first among seven municipalities to have an evacuation order for all residents lifted since the meltdowns at the plant in March 2011.

The central government notified Naraha officials July 6 that it had fixed the date. Mayor Yukiei Matsumoto accepted the plan, saying the town will help residents resettle.

The removal of the evacuation order is aimed at "accelerating the town's recovery" from the nuclear disaster, said Yosuke Takagi, state minister of economy, trade and industry, during a meeting with Matsumoto.

Takagi, who heads the on-site headquarters of the nuclear disaster response task force, said the government believes that radioactive contamination in the town is "not dangerous enough to continue forcing evacuation on residents who want to return home."

He also pointed out that prolonged evacuation will have a negative impact on residents' health and will deprive the town of recovery opportunities if private businesses are prevented from starting up in the area.

The lifting of the evacuation order for Nahara will be the first case among the seven municipalities in which almost all the residents as well as municipal governments were forced to evacuate.

The majority of the town's 7,400 residents currently live in temporary housing and publicly subsidized apartments in other parts of Fukushima Prefecture or elsewhere. They will be allowed to return home permanently once the evacuation order is removed.

Even after the evacuation order is lifted, residents can remain living in the temporary shelters and other dwellings where they currently reside rent-free until March 2017.

Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the crippled plant, has also pledged to continue paying compensation to all residents until at least March 2018.

On June 17, Takagi had proposed lifting the evacuation order before the Bon holiday period in mid-August, but this plan was opposed by local officials and residents who argued that not enough had been done to restore the town's environment.

The central government pushed back the date to Sept. 5, assessing the government's efforts have met three criteria necessary to lift the evacuation order: lower airborne radiation, improved infrastructure and administrative services, and a sufficient consultation period for residents and the local authority to discuss the situation with central government officials.

(This article was written by Takuro Negishi and Akifumi Nagahashi.)

Fukushima people take offense over "psychological issue"...

July 7, 2015

Fukushima town residents protest official's comment about radiation safety

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150707p2a00m0na019000c.html>

Nuclear evacuees from the Fukushima Prefecture town of Naraha have protested over a government official's comment that he thinks the safety of the town's drinking water is "a psychological issue." The whole town was designated as a no-entry zone after the Fukushima No.1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster, but is set to have its evacuation order lifted on Sept. 5, as announced by Vice-Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Yosuke Takagi on July 6 when he visited the town. After the announcement, he held a press conference where, in response to a reporter's question he pointed out that radioactive cesium amounts in Naraha tap water are below the detectable level, and said, "People differ in how they think about radiation. I think whether you think (the water source is) safe or not is a psychological issue." There is deep-rooted concern among town residents after sampling in July last year by the Ministry of the Environment found up to 18,700 becquerels of radioactive cesium per kilogram of soil at the bottom of the reservoir at the Kido Dam. That reservoir is the source of tap water for the town.

After Takagi's comment, a Naraha resident in his 60s who has already finished reconstructing his house in preparation for returning to the town said, "That comment makes me lose my desire to go back. **Does he intend to say it's people's own fault (that they feel unsafe)?**"

Another resident in her 50s said, "If he (vice-economy minister Takagi) could understand the feeling of wanting to return to one's hometown, he would not have said such a thing."

Naraha will be the third no-go zone to have its evacuation order rescinded, after the withdrawal of one for the Miyakoji district of the city of Tamura in April last year, followed by the eastern part of the village of Kawamura in October. It will be the first of the seven municipalities in the prefecture where all residents had been ordered to evacuate to have the order lifted.

At first, the government was aiming to have Naraha's order lifted in early August, but after criticism that there were not enough measures in place to help residents live there, the government delayed the lifting

of the evacuation order by around a month to prepare additional measures such as increasing the number of free buses.

"We are reminded once again that the government can't be trusted," said Naraha resident Noboru Endo, 43, who is living in the western Tokyo suburb of Musashino as an evacuee with his 9-year-old son Shota. He feels that the national government is not listening to the voices of those calling for the safety and ease of mind of Naraha residents.

Endo's wife Katsuko, 40, stayed behind in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture for her job, but Endo, who worked as a cook in Naraha, decided to evacuate with Shota, a kindergartener at the time of the disaster, for the sake of his son's health.

These days, Shota is enjoying school in Musashino. He has made many friends there and says he doesn't want to leave. With over four years having passed since the nuclear disaster, life as evacuees is changing into the norm for this family.

Every day, however, Endo wants more to return to his hometown and live there with his family. There was a briefing in late June held in Tokyo by the national government for Naraha residents ahead of the scheduled lifting of the evacuation order. Endo brought Shota with him to let him know about the current situation in Naraha and so he wouldn't forget about going back to their hometown.

However, Endo is dissatisfied with the national government not showing any concrete measures for what it will do about the high levels of radioactive cesium at the bottom of the reservoir.

"Even if the government tells us our tap water is safe, how can we relax? If my generation, who have children, do not return, my hometown will not recover. That's why I want to return, and I want the government to do everything it can to prepare a safe living environment there," Endo says.

Fukushima evacuees must still be helped to rebuild their lives

July 9, 2015

EDITORIAL: Support must continue to help Fukushima evacuees rebuild their lives

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201507090061>

The government has decided to lift evacuation orders for wide areas around the disaster-stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant and end blanket compensation payments to people in Fukushima Prefecture who are still suffering from the aftermath of the reactor meltdowns.

More than four years since the nuclear disaster, the uncertain future of the affected local communities and their members is causing further negative effects.

Setting clear dates for lifting evacuation orders will make it easier for evacuees to plan their futures. The move is also meaningful in terms of clarifying the government's responsibilities to improve the environment for the evacuees' return home through such measures as decontamination and rebuilding infrastructure related to their daily lives.

But the conditions are not the same for each disaster victim. The move to lift evacuation orders and end compensation payments should not be a simple termination of policy support. It is essential for the government to start fresh support based on careful consideration of the circumstances of individual sufferers.

POSSIBLE BOOST TO RECONSTRUCTION EFFORTS

The government has set clear dates for lifting the evacuation orders for two of the three categories of restricted areas—"areas to which evacuation orders are ready to be lifted" and "areas in which the residents are not permitted to live." The levels of radiation in these areas are relatively low, and entry into these areas is permitted in the daytime.

The evacuation orders for these areas will be removed by March 2017 at the latest after accelerated decontamination efforts.

The people of Naraha, a town that has been entirely designated as "an area to which the evacuation order is ready to be lifted," will be allowed to return home on Sept. 5.

The town will be the first among seven municipalities to have an evacuation order for all residents lifted since the meltdowns at the plant in March 2011.

For the residents to be able to start living in the town again, however, it is vital to repair or rebuild damaged houses and secure jobs for the returnees.

Major homebuilders have been reluctant to work in evacuation areas, saying they can't carry out operations until the evacuation orders are lifted.

Since it was stuck by the disaster, Naraha has persuaded 11 companies to locate their plants in the town. All but one of these companies, however, have been waiting for the removal of the evacuation order to start building the plants.

The scheduled end of the evacuation will bolster efforts to rebuild the community. In a survey of evacuated Naraha residents conducted last autumn, 45.7 percent of the respondents said they would return to their homes in the town either "immediately" or "when necessary conditions are met" after the evacuation order ends. The figure represents an increase of 5.5 percentage points from the previous survey.

But it will be difficult to completely restore the status quo. Many evacuee families have members who are already working at places where they currently live or children who have grown accustomed to their new schools.

NO RETURN TO PRE-DISASTER LIFE

Evacuation orders for parts of Tamura and Kawauchi have already been lifted, but only about half of the residents of these areas have returned.

If the population of an area doesn't recover sufficiently, it will be difficult to operate such public facilities as medical institutions and schools in the area. This further discourages residents from returning.

Farmers and self-employed people in such areas also face a tough time trying to restart their businesses. Concerns about radioactive contamination of food grown in disaster areas will remain even though test growing of certain crops has started in some areas. Part of local farmland has been used for provisional storage of soil and plant debris from the decontamination work. Heaps of large bags filled with contaminated materials remain at many sites.

A survey by the Fukushima Federation of Societies of Commerce and Industry of members in evacuation areas found that 56.4 percent of the respondents had restarted their businesses either in or outside the prefecture by June this year.

But most of them are construction or manufacturing businesses, while only a few of the affected retailers and service providers have started doing business again. That's because their trade areas have disappeared.

After the evacuation order for the Miyakoji district of Tamura was lifted in April last year, a temporary store to sell foodstuffs and daily necessities was opened under the government's leadership. A convenience store was then opened along a national highway under the initiative of the government. Sales

at the store have plunged to a quarter of their peak level partly because of route sales of another convenience store.

In Naraha, a local supermarket is struggling to rebuild. It is concerned about a possible blow to its operations from a new store of retail giant Aeon Co. that is expected to open within a commercial complex built by the neighboring town of Hirono along a national highway.

Amid these circumstances, compensation payments to disaster victims by the government and Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the Fukushima No. 1 plant, will be discontinued.

Compensation for mental health damage (or consolation money of 100,000 yen per month per person) will end after the payments for March 2018. Compensation for damage to businesses paid to small and midsize companies and self-employed people that remain out of business will be terminated after the payments for March 2017.

Critics have been pointing out problems with the way such compensation has been paid to people and businesses damaged by the disaster. They say the compensation programs widen the economic disparity between the recipients and those who don't receive the money, divide communities and hinder victims' efforts to regain economic independence.

PAY ATTENTION TO DIFFERENT CONDITIONS OF INDIVIDUALS

But rebuilding shattered lives entails formidable challenges. Consolation money is often used to cover living expenses.

If evacuees can't find a way to earn a living in their towns, they will be unable to make ends meet when they return to their homes after the evacuation order is lifted.

The government plans to set up a new public-private organization to help self-employed people and farmers restart their businesses in the next two years. The new body will start its work by visiting 8,000 such people for counseling by the end of the year.

But there is still no plan for specific steps to be taken. It will take considerable time just to grasp what kind of situation they are in.

Fuminori Tanba, an associate professor at Fukushima University who has been involved in the development of reconstruction plans for many disaster-hit areas, points out some key factors for successful support to such businesses.

It is crucial to draw up a detailed prescription for each business to sort out the challenges it faces, he says. It is also important to take measures to coordinate the trade areas of similar businesses and retrain those who are seeking to change their businesses.

Tanba also stresses the need to pay attention to problems these people face after restarting their businesses to ensure that they will get on track.

In short, policy support should be provided through the entire process of business reconstruction.

In addition to such support, the government should consider creating a public framework to provide financial aid to cover living expenses for people struggling to rebuild their livelihoods.

These people are suffering from a disaster that happened at a nuclear power plant built under the government's policy of promoting nuclear power generation. The government should not end financial aid to individual residents of the affected areas.

Four years since the harrowing accident, the conditions of individual residents of areas around the crippled plant remain complicated.

It is necessary for the government to make flexible responses to their needs from their own viewpoints. Now is the critical moment for work to rebuild the lives of people in Fukushima that were destroyed by the disaster.

--The Asahi Shimbun, July 9

Emperor and Empress in Fukushima

July 17, 2015

Emperor and empress visit Fukushima, console evacuees

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201507170041>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

FUKUSHIMA--Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko on July 16 offered words of encouragement to six people who were evacuated from their hometowns after the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami triggered the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

One of them, Kyoko Akaishizawa, 61, from Iitate village, told the emperor that she was unable to return home despite the decontamination work.

The emperor consoled her, saying: "(The radiation level) hasn't declined sufficiently even after the decontamination, has it? It's troublesome."

Before the talks in Fukushima city, the imperial couple visited a peach farmer in Koori town.

The empress encouraged the farmer, saying, "You probably had hard times during the time of decontamination, didn't you?"

In the evening, the couple went to the Nasu Imperial Villa in Nasu, Tochigi Prefecture. They plan to return to Tokyo on July 21.

New town in Miyagi Pref.

July 20, 2015

Tsunami survivors open new town on Miyagi farmland

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201507200089>



The town of Tamaura-Nishi is born in Iwanuma, Miyagi Prefecture, on July 19.
(Provided by Takeki Izumi, assistant professor at Tokyo Metropolitan University)

By HIDEAKI ISHIBASHI/ Staff Writer

IWANUMA, Miyagi Prefecture--They prayed for their lost loved ones, reminisced about their agony and despair and thanked the people who came to their rescue. And then, more than 800 survivors of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami started their new lives in a recently completed town built on nearly 20 hectares of what was once farmland.

The town of Tamaura-Nishi was born on July 19 within the city of Iwanuma, four years and four months after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami slammed coastal areas of the Tohoku region.

People from six tsunami-devastated communities in Iwanuma relocated to Tamaura-Nishi. It is the first new town with more than 100 households from municipalities affected by the disaster.

The town's inauguration ceremony was held at a citizens hall on the morning of July 19. It started with a silent prayer for the 181 residents of Iwanuma who were killed in the tsunami.

Miyu Sakurai, 15, a third-year junior high school student, talked about her optimism for the new town in a speech she gave at the ceremony.

"I am very happy because I can study in my own room. I am proud of the fact that Tamaura-Nishi is my hometown," said Sakurai, who lived in a temporary housing facility for about four years after her house was washed away by the tsunami.

Yoko Saito, 52, also took the stage and talked about her feelings of helplessness when she saw how the tsunami had reduced her previous neighborhood of Hasegama, one of the six communities, to rubble in 2011.

"I was filled with extreme anxiety, thinking, 'How will I live from now on?'" she recalled.

Saito was also at a loss on whether to join the group relocation to the Tamaura-Nishi district. She eventually decided to relocate there after her eldest daughter, Aya, 26, said, "We should join the relocation because we like Tamaura."

Their new house was completed in July 2014. Showing a photo of her family taken at that time, Saito said, "This smile is a present from all of you."

Iwanuma city is considered a forerunner in reconstruction from the 2011 disaster, but building a town from scratch required special coordination.

"It was good that each community had leaders, and that they were quick in making decisions," said Hiroo Kikuchi, the 62-year-old mayor of Iwanuma.

The Tamaura-Nishi district was chosen as the relocation site in November 2011, eight months after the quake and tsunami.

From June 2012, leaders from the six communities held 28 meetings on what type of town they would create.

The town of Tamaura-Nishi was built on a farmland area measuring 750 meters by 250 meters and about 3 kilometers from the coast. The entire project cost about 19.6 billion yen (about \$158 million).

Sales or leases of 158 plots started in December 2013. In addition, 178 completed houses were offered for rent. Actual relocations to the new town began in April 2014.

A total of 833 people from 315 households have moved to the area, accounting for 60 percent of residents from the six communities. The remaining 40 percent, mainly families with young children, have relocated elsewhere.

The name of the town was selected through voting by residents. Junior high school students came up with the names of four parks in Tamaura-Nishi.

A large supermarket was opened in Tamaura-Nishi on July 7 and has since been attracting customers even from areas outside the town.

"Since the disaster, we have been making efforts together and have shared the same thoughts," said Katsuyoshi Nakagawa, 76, who coordinated the opinions from the six communities. "That has led to the birth of a good town."

On the afternoon of July 19, residents of the Tamaura-Nishi district unveiled a monument in the new town and expressed gratitude to all people concerned.

At the end of the event, residents performed a mid-summer Bon-odori dance, the first time in five years that the traditional dance festival has been held.

"Today is the starting day of our hometown," one of the residents said.

"Breathing life back" in Fukushima?

July 20, 2015

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201507200062>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

KAWAUCHI, Fukushima Prefecture--A tourism association here has turned to booze created with buckwheat, a local specialty, to breathe life back into a village depleted by the nearby Fukushima nuclear disaster.

At the request of the Kawauchi tourism association, beer brewers in Fukushima Prefecture have developed two types of low-malt imitation beer using buckwheat, which is typically used to make soba noodles.

"I want to encourage residents of the village by developing new local specialty products," said Shigeru Ide, who heads the tourism body.

The 330-milliliter beverages are each priced at 620 yen (\$4.99), including tax, and became available at shops throughout Kawauchi earlier this month.

The Soba Garden imitation beer tastes strong, while Kyo has a light flavor.

Before the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, Kawauchi was one of the largest producing centers of buckwheat in the prefecture.

Although evacuation orders have been lifted for most parts of Kawauchi, half of its 2,700 residents still live outside the village as evacuees.

3,000 Fukushima residents claim mental distress

July 21, 2015

Over 3,000 Fukushima residents seek compensation for mental distress from nuclear disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150721p2a00m0na014000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- More than 3,000 residents here have filed for compensation for mental distress over radiation emanating from the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster through an out-of-court settlement system, it has been learned.

The claim was filed with the government-backed Nuclear Damage Claim Dispute Resolution Center by 3,107 residents in 1,107 households in the Watari district of the city of Fukushima on July 21. They comprise about 20 percent of Watari residents.

Through an alternative dispute resolution (ADR) procedure, these residents are demanding plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) pay 100,000 yen per person per month and 200,000 yen per person for the first six months after the meltdown when radiation levels were higher.

The residents claim that they harbor health concerns over radiation exposure and suffer from other forms of mental distress from the nuclear disaster. Watari is located about 60 kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 plant and is known for relatively higher radiation levels compared to other districts in the city of Fukushima. According to the Fukushima Municipal Government, the radiation doses in Watari topped 2 microsieverts per hour over a six-month period since the onset of the nuclear crisis.

According to Watari residents, there are still a large number of spots in Watari whose radiation levels are over twice the national government's criteria for decontamination work, which is 0.23 microsieverts per hour.

Under the national government guidelines, residents in government-ordered evacuation zones and "specific spots recommended for evacuation," where radiation dosage is regionally high, are entitled to

100,000 yen each a month under TEPCO's compensation for mental distress. However, residents in the city of Fukushima have been paid only 120,000 yen per adult thus far as the city falls under a voluntary evacuation zone.

"The Watari district was not designated as a specific evacuation recommendation spot because the national and prefectural governments wanted to avoid a situation where residents in the center of the city evacuate. We should be entitled to compensation on par with that for residents in specific evacuation recommendation spots," one of the residents said at a news conference on July 21.

In November last year, about 1,000 residents in the city of Fukushima's Onami district -- about 90 percent of the district's population -- filed for compensation from TEPCO via the ADR center as the area has been plagued by relatively higher radiation doses.

Dilemma

July 23, 2015

Nuclear evacuees face dilemma over returning home

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/07/23/national/social-issues/nuclear-evacuees-face-dilemma-returning-home/#.VbE-sPnwmic>

by Natsuko Fukue

AFP-JJI

NARAHA, FUKUSHIMA PREF. – More than four years since Satoru Yamauchi abandoned his noodle restaurant to escape radiation spreading from the tsunami-wrecked Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, the central government is almost ready to declare it is safe for him to go home.

But like many of the displaced, he's not sure if he wants to. "I want my old life back, but I don't think it's possible here," he said on a recent visit to the dusty *soba* buckwheat noodle restaurant in Nahara that he ran for more than two decades.

The father of four has lived in Tokyo since evacuating from his home to escape toxic pollution spewing from the crippled reactors hit by gigantic tsunami in March 2011.

Meltdowns in three of the reactors — 20 km away — blanketed vast tracts of land with isotopes of iodine and cesium, products of nuclear reactions that are hazardous to health if ingested, inhaled or absorbed. Of the municipalities immediately surrounding the nuclear plant, which were totally evacuated, Naraha will be the first where people will be allowed to return.

After years of decontamination work, where teams remove topsoil, wash exposed road surfaces and wipe down buildings, the government will in September lift the evacuation order and declare it a safe place to live.

Other towns and villages will follow in the coming months and years, with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's government aiming to lift many evacuation orders by March 2017.

A year after that, the monthly ¥100,000 (\$800) in "psychological compensation" that plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. has been ordered to pay to evacuees will cease.

Activists say despite government assurances, many areas still show high levels of radiation, and many are unfit for habitation.

They say that for people who abandoned now-almost-worthless — but still mortgaged — homes, allowing Tepco to stop payments amounts to forcing them to return.

Environmental campaign group Greenpeace has carried out a study of radiation contamination in Iitate, a heavily forested 200 sq.-km district that sits around 40 km northwest of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 plant. Iitate is also being eyed for resettlement.

The town is significant because the government did not order its evacuation until more than a month after the nuclear disaster started, but post-facto modeling of the radiation plume showed Iitate was right in its path.

Greenpeace's new study, published Tuesday, says only a quarter of Iitate has been decontaminated — predominantly roads, homes and a short buffer strip of woodland around inhabited areas.

"Levels of radiation in both decontaminated and non-decontaminated areas . . . make a return of the former inhabitants of Iitate not possible from a public health . . . perspective," the report says.

A person living in the area could expect to absorb 20 times the internationally accepted level for public exposure of radiation, Greenpeace says.

"The levels of radiation in the forests, which pre-accident were an integral part of (life), are equivalent to radiation levels within the Chernobyl 30-km exclusion zone," the report says, referring to the former Soviet plant that saw one of the world's worst nuclear accidents.

"Over 118,000 people were permanently evacuated from the 30-km zone around Chernobyl in April 1986, with no prospect or plans for them ever returning."

The woodlands of Iitate are "acting as a long lasting reservoir for radiocesium and as a large source for future recontamination in the environment beyond the forest," the report says. That makes the very notion of "decontamination" problematic, says Jan Vande Putte, a nuclear campaigner with Greenpeace, who was in Iitate last week. "There is a risk that the migration of radiation will re-contaminate decontaminated areas," he said.

In Naraha, which is southeast of the plant, government data show contamination levels are much lower than Iitate. A town survey says there are plenty of residents eager to return and rebuild.

The end of the evacuation order is "based on citizens' real voices and plans to accelerate reconstruction," pro-resettlement Mayor Yukiei Matsumoto said this month, adding a "prolonged evacuee life is not desirable."

Supporters of returning point out that while the nuclear disaster is not officially recorded as having directly killed anyone, the stresses and strains of evacuee life exact their own price. Government figures show almost 1,000 people in Fukushima Prefecture have died from physical and psychological fatigue. Still, the choice is hard. "You cannot work on a farm, you cannot grow rice, and you cannot pick wild plants either," said Yamauchi, whose specialty used to be tempura with seasonal wild vegetables. "(The restaurant) is my everything. . . it was my life. There is nothing good about going back."

Beef producer sues TEPCO and Gov't for lost sales of compost

July 24, 2015

Fukushima cattle producer's beef with TEPCO, government leads to lawsuit

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201507240084>

By YASUO KOJIMA/ Staff Writer

KORIYAMA, Fukushima Prefecture--A local cattle producer has sued Tokyo Electric Power Co. and the government to recover 500 million yen (\$4 million) **in losses it says it suffered as a result of the 2011 nuclear disaster.**

In the suit filed with the Koriyama branch of the Fukushima District Court on July 16, the plaintiff, Ueno Bokujo, cited a drop in beef cattle prices. It also contends that it has been forced to spend more on the disposal of manure produced by its herds due to declining sales following the accident at TEPCO's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The company, which raises nearly 2,900 heads of cattle on its ranches in Koriyama and Tamura, is one of the largest such producers in Fukushima Prefecture.

Ueno Bokujo says TEPCO has failed to pay it the 200 million yen that it says it lost due to a drop in beef cattle prices in fiscal 2014.

According to an arrangement made after the accident, TEPCO was to compensate farmers for losses incurred if they made a claim.

The cattle producer estimates it will cost 2 billion yen to dispose of the 17,000 tons of manure that have accumulated on its farms.

The suit is the first to seek compensation for lost sales of compost, according to the Fukushima Prefectural Central Union Agricultural Cooperatives.

"We will respond sincerely after listening carefully to what the plaintiff has to say in court," a TEPCO official said.

A government official declined to comment, saying a written complaint has not yet been delivered.

Evacuees forced to return

from Beyondnuclear.org

Fukushima evacuees have died, others may be forced to return

About 3,200 evacuees forced to abandon their homes as a result of the Fukushima nuclear disaster have died, but Japan's Abe government now wants others to return to still highly radioactive areas. The just released 2015 World Nuclear Industry Status Report notes that more than half of the evacuee deaths - many of which resulted from "decreased physical condition or suicide" - are among people from the Fukushima Prefecture. The Abe government says it will end compensation to evacuees by March 2018, effectively leaving them no option but to return to contaminated areas. But a new analysis from Greenpeace finds that radiation is so high in the Iitate district of Fukushima prefecture that it can never be decontaminated and that "it will be impossible for people to safely return to their homes." And WNISR lead author, Mycle Schneider, slammed decontamination efforts as "hopelessly inefficient." Greenpeace based its conclusions on its own radiation survey and sampling program in Iitate. Watch Greenpeace campaigner and Beyond Nuclear board member, Kendra Ulrich, explain the situation in Japan.

Reconstruction plans for 12 Fukushima municipalities

July 26, 2015

Reconstruction plans drawn up for no-go municipalities near Fukushima plant

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/07/26/national/reconstruction-plans-drawn-up-for-no-go-municipalities-near-fukushima-plant/#.VbT3j_nwmid

JJI

FUKUSHIMA – On Saturday an advisory panel at the Reconstruction Agency produced a final draft of proposals to help 12 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture recover from the March 2011 nuclear accident.

The proposals include **improving medical services to help evacuees return home, developing new industries including in the robotics sector to create jobs, and beefing up administrative services by getting municipalities to cooperate with each other more closely.**

The draft declares a goal of completing reconstruction plan **by 2020. The municipalities are all located close to the Fukushima No. 1** nuclear plant, the site of the disaster.

The central government will work to secure funding for the proposed measures, Reconstruction Minister Wataru Takeshita told reporters after the advisory panel met in the city of Fukushima.

The central government has pledged to lift evacuation orders for the 12 municipalities, by March 2017, although areas with persistently high radiation levels are excluded from the target.

New 8.7 meters seawall in Nahara

July 27, 2015

Construction of seawall begins in Naraha

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Jul. 27, 2015 - Updated 12:03 UTC+2

Construction of a new seawall has begun in a town near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, as authorities prepare to lift an evacuation order covering the area in September.

The seawall in Naraha Town was seriously damaged by the March 2011 tsunami. Construction of a new one had been delayed as radiation from the nuclear accident restricted entry to the town for about a year and a half.

Local government officials took part in a groundbreaking ceremony in the town on Monday ahead of the construction. Three trucks unloaded soil at the site after the ceremony.

The new seawall will be about 1.8 kilometers long. It will be built more inland than the previous one.

Its height will be 8.7 meters above sea level. That's 2.5 meters higher than the previous one.

The construction will cost about 67 million dollars, and will be completed by March 2018.

The town of Naraha has a population of about 7,400. The evacuation order, covering almost the entire town, is scheduled to be lifted on September 5th.

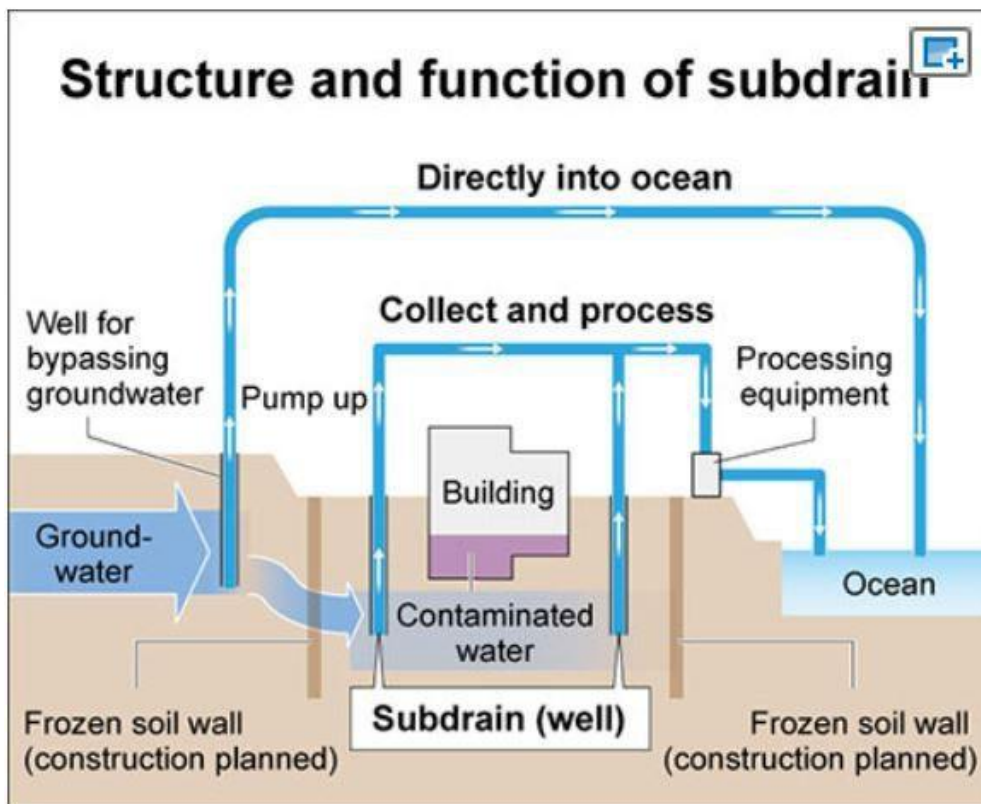
Town Mayor Yukiei Matsumoto says some residents still suffer from memories of the tsunami, but he expects the construction to give them relief about returning home.

Fishermen approve TEPCO subdrain plan

July 28, 2015

Fukushima fishermen OK TEPCO plan to release decontaminated water into sea

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201507280063>



The Asahi Shimbun

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

SOMA, Fukushima Prefecture--Fishermen in northern Fukushima Prefecture gave Tokyo Electric Power Co. the green light on July 27 to release radioactive groundwater from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant into the ocean after it undergoes decontamination treatment.

The Soma-Futaba fisheries cooperative association approved TEPCO's "subdrain plan" at a board member meeting after earlier approval by the Iwaki fisheries union, which brings together fishermen operating on the southern Fukushima coast, to back the plant operator's plan.

After the decisions by the two fisheries unions, the Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations is expected to formally approve the subdrain plan in mid-August at the earliest. To deal with the accumulation of contaminated groundwater at the plant, TEPCO and the central government implemented from May last year a "groundwater bypass" that intercepts clean groundwater before it flows into contaminated reactor buildings and reroutes it safely around the facility into the ocean.

Under the subdrain plan, the utility will pump 500 tons of water from 41 subdrain wells around the premises of the plant's four crippled reactors each day. It expects that the amount of groundwater flowing into the reactor buildings will be drastically reduced, and the amount of contaminated water generated at the plant will be halved from the current levels.

The water will be released into the sea after it undergoes decontamination treatment to reduce cesium levels to below 1 becquerel and beta ray-emitting radioactive materials to less than 3 becquerels.

Because the decontamination equipment cannot remove tritium, water contaminated with the radioactive isotope that emits 1,500 becquerels or more of radiation will not be released into the sea.

TEPCO has sought the fisheries cooperatives' approval of the subdrain plan.

But TEPCO's delay in disclosing the flow of radioactive water into the ocean whenever it rained--which came to light in February--hampered negotiations with the fisheries unions, which felt the incident undermined their confidence in the utility.

At the meeting of the board members of the Soma-Futaba fisheries union, TEPCO officials explained that the subdrain plan was essential in reducing the flow of contaminated water into the ocean, according to Hiroyuki Sato, the union president.

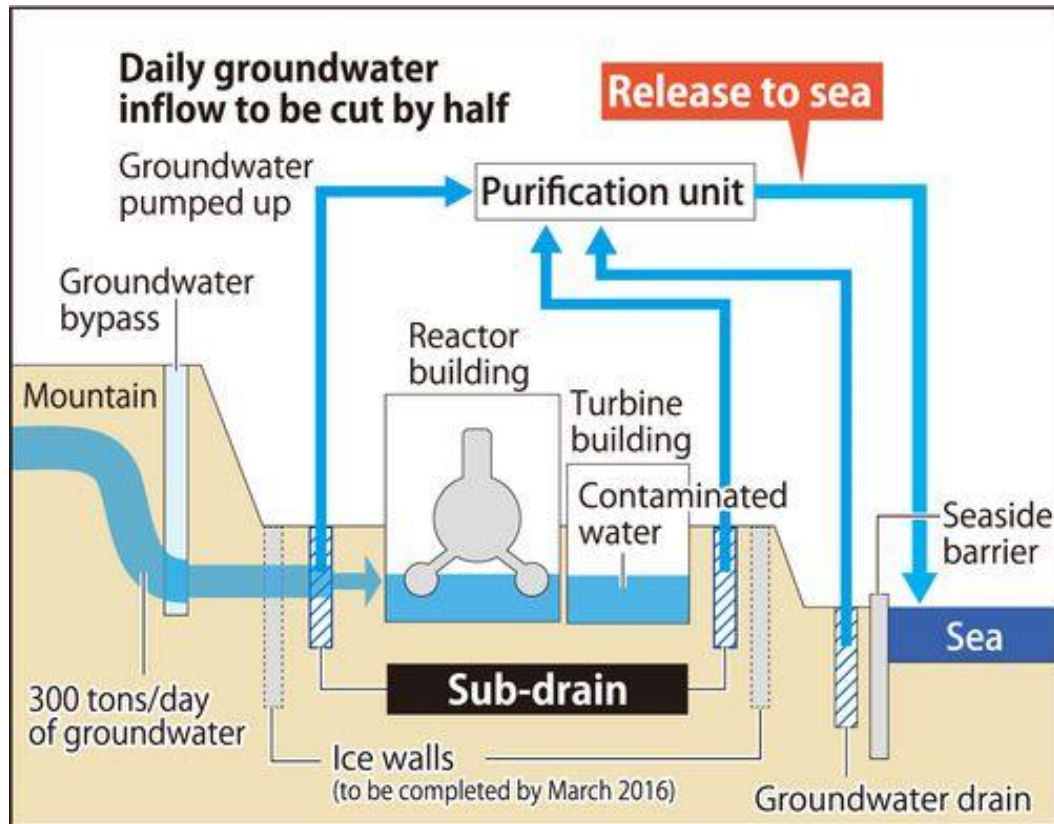
The members who had remained strongly opposed eventually recognized the need for the subdrain plan and agreed to approve it, Sato said.

Based on requests from the two local fisheries cooperatives, the prefectural federation of fisheries unions will demand that TEPCO and the central government conduct periodic checks on waters emitted from the subdrain program.

The prefectural union will also request that a third-party watchdog monitor the process to prevent contaminated water from flowing into the ocean.

It will also request that TEPCO and the government to continue to provide compensation to local fishermen, while taking effective measures when the subdrain project causes harmful rumors about their products.

Fukushima fisheries co-ops approve TEPCO's contaminated water 'subdrain plan'



TEPCO's sub-drain plan (Mainichi)

Click to enlarge

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150728p2a00m0na016000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- Local fisheries cooperatives have approved of Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO)'s "subdrain plan" at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant whereby radioactively contaminated groundwater goes through a purification unit and is released to the sea as they have no better options to speed up the recovery of the local fishing industry.

"We are compelled to agree (with TEPCO's plan) for the recovery of the fishing business in Fukushima Prefecture," Hiroyuki Sato, 59, head of Soma-Futaba fisheries cooperative association told reporters after a board meeting on July 27 in Soma, Fukushima Prefecture. He looked relieved to have achieved consensus among association board members to approve the subdrain plan. Sato, along with the cooperative's other senior officials, have grown distrustful of TEPCO and the government after a series of incidents of contaminated water leaking into the sea. However, they judged that delaying making a decision on the matter would not provide them with another option.

TEPCO and the government have explained the subdrain system to Fukushima fisheries cooperatives as one of the best solutions for controlling the contaminated water leak.

There are three fisheries cooperative associations in Fukushima Prefecture -- Soma-Futaba and Iwaki that mainly operate coastal fishing and Onahama trawl fishery engaged in distant ocean fishing. Senior officials from TEPCO and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry have been visiting these cooperatives since this past spring to apologize for a series of contaminated water mishaps.

If the subdrain system is utilized, it will not only reduce the amount of groundwater flowing into nuclear reactor buildings, but is also expected to stop contaminated water leaking into the harbor with seaside barriers surrounding No. 1 to No. 4 reactor buildings. TEPCO asked for understanding of the subdrain

system from the cooperatives, explaining that unless the seaside barriers are closed at an early stage, over 300 metric tons of contaminated water will flow into the sea every day.

A sense of crisis among the fisheries cooperatives has driven them to approve the subdrain plan. The number of Soma-Futaba and Iwaki cooperative members fell after the March 2011 disaster. Soma-Futaba cooperative saw its membership drop from 1,119 to 947 and Iwaki from 433 to 362 in four years.

Furthermore, the fish haul from test fishing carried out about twice a week off the coast outside the 20-kilometer no-go zone around the nuclear plant totals less than 10 percent of the pre-disaster level for both cooperatives. Soma-Futaba head Sato began telling people close to him around May this year that he couldn't face his son who had succeeded his fishing business after the disaster.

The Iwaki fisheries cooperative, which announced approval of the subdrain plan earlier than Soma-Futaba, shares a sense of crisis for the Fukushima fishing industry. Cooperative chief Masakazu Yabuki, 79, says the early start of full operations is crucial to keep Iwaki's fishing industry alive. He added that the decision to accept the subdrain plan shows how desperate local fishermen are, saying, "We just have to trust the government and TEPCO."

Those belonging to the Ukedo and Tomikuma branches of the Soma-Futaba cooperative resisted the TEPCO plan until the very end. These fishermen worked in coastal areas such as Namie, Futaba and Tomioka, located within the 20-kilometer zone, but they scattered to remote locations after the disaster. Test fishing operations are not being carried out in these areas, and local fishermen have no prospects of restarting their businesses.

Soma-Futaba's Sato announced on July 27 that he began negotiating with Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations Chairman Tetsu Nozaki to expand the areas where test fishing can be operated. Sato said he persuaded the two branches by telling them that the seaside barriers need to be shut as early as possible for the expansion of test fishing.

Meanwhile, some fishermen are concerned about opposite effects of TEPCO's subdrain plan regarding damage by harmful rumors. Takehiko Niizuma, a 54-year-old trawler fisherman and a member of the Iwaki fisheries cooperative, remained suspicious, saying, "The plan could give the government and TEPCO excuses that even highly contaminated water (stored in tanks) can be released into the sea if it's processed or treated through the subdrain system."

TEPCO sued by family of 102 year-old suicidee

July 28, 2015

Lawsuit planned over suicide of 102-year-old amid nuclear crisis

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/07/28/national/crime-legal/lawsuit-planned-suicide-102-year-old-amid-nuclear-crisis/#.VbdOwfnwmif>

Kyodo

FUKUSHIMA – Relatives of a 102-year-old man who committed suicide in 2011 said they will file a damages suit Wednesday against Tokyo Electric Power Co. for the mental agony he suffered in being forced out of his life-long home by the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

A total of ¥60 million will be sought against Tepco by three relatives of Fumio Okubo, who was found dead in his home in the village of Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture, about a month after the crisis began at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear complex in March 2011.

Iitate, located about 40 km northwest of the plant, is where Okubo was born and lived his entire life. An evacuation order was issued for the area on April 22, 2011, and is still in force.

According to the plaintiffs, Okubo learned on April 11, 2011, through a television news program that the government planned to issue an evacuation order for his village.

He told his daughter-in-law, Mieko Okubo, 62, that "I don't want to evacuate." He also said, "I think I have lived a bit too long."

The following day, she found Okubo had hanged himself in his room.

In the lawsuit to be filed with the Fukushima District Court, the plaintiffs plan to argue that Okubo "was not able to think about living anywhere else" because his "acquaintances, property and purpose of life were all in the village."

They will also say that the imminent evacuation order was the cause of his suicide.

Mieko Okubo, who will be one of the plaintiffs, said she still recalls the time she spent with her father-in-law in the living room of their home where they could look out and see a village richly endowed with nature.

Okubo was married and had eight children. He rarely ventured far from his home, and he was healthy and able to walk on his own even in his advanced age.

"I wonder what grandpa had thought when he tried to hang himself," Mieko Okubo said. "I want others to know there were people who died in such a way due to the nuclear accident."

At that time, her husband and Okubo's son, Kazuo Okubo, was struggling with an illness at a hospital in Niigata Prefecture. She did not tell him about his father's death and he died in June 2011 at the age of 66. The Fukushima District Court has acknowledged causal links between the nuclear evacuation and suicides in rulings on two lawsuits.

TEPCO sued by family of 102 year-old suicidee (2)

July 29, 2015

TEPCO sued over suicide of 102-year-old

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Jul. 29, 2015 - Updated 10:14 UTC+2

The family of an elderly man who killed himself upon hearing that his village would be evacuated after the nuclear plant disaster in Fukushima has filed for damages from the facility's operator.

Fumio Okubo, then 102 years old, committed suicide at his home in Iitate Village, Fukushima Prefecture, in April 2011. He'd heard the day before that residents there would be told to evacuate due to the Fukushima Daiichi accident.

Okubo is thought to have been in despair over the prospect of leaving his home.

3 of his relatives filed a lawsuit with the Fukushima District Court on Wednesday, seeking more than 485,000 dollars from Tokyo Electric Power Company.

They say that had the disaster not happened, Okubo could have died a natural death in the village where he'd been living happily.

His daughter-in-law Mieko Okubo, 62, had been living with him for nearly 40 years. She said she wants the firm to understand the gravity of suicide by a 102-year-old, and the pain of his bereaved family. She added that they want to express their feelings in court.

Tokyo Electric says it will study the petition in detail and deal with it sincerely.

Iitate's more than 6,000 residents left the village after being ordered to evacuate.

Relatives sue TEPCO over suicide of 102-year-old man in nuclear evacuation zone

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150729p2a00m0na012000c.html>

Relatives of a 102-year-old man who hanged himself after learning that his village in Fukushima Prefecture would be designated as a nuclear disaster evacuation zone filed a lawsuit against nuclear plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) on July 29 seeking damages.

The three relatives of Fumio Okubo, who lived in the Fukushima Prefecture village of Iitate, claim that the cause of Okubo's suicide in 2011 was being psychologically driven into a corner by the prospect of being forced to evacuate. In their lawsuit, filed in the Fukushima District Court, they are demanding 60.05 million yen in damages.

According to the suit, Okubo was born and raised in Iitate, and he had lived a peaceful life before the outbreak of the disaster, attending a facility catering to the elderly and going for walks.

On April 11, 2011, the government announced that the village of Iitate, which lies 30 to 50 kilometers away from TEPCO's crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, would be designated as a planned evacuation zone.

Okubo, who learned the news on television, told his family, "I don't want to evacuate. I've lived a bit too long." The following morning he was found hanged in his room.

"He lived in Iitate for 102 years, and all of his acquaintances, his possessions and his reason for living were in the village," Okubo's relatives said in their claim. "He thought that if he was going to live away from his hometown while causing trouble for his family, it would be better to kill himself, so he took his own life. There is no other plausible reason for his suicide than being forced to evacuate as a result of the nuclear disaster."

Iitate is still under an evacuation order.

There have been two past rulings in the Fukushima District Court that have recognized a causal relationship between the nuclear disaster and people's suicides and have ordered TEPCO to pay damages. The rulings in both cases have been finalized.

A TEPCO public relations official commented, "We'd like to carefully hear the argument and details of the claim and respond sincerely."

102 year-old suicidee - TEPCO must apologise

July 29, 2015

Fukushima family demands apology from TEPCO over suicide of 102-year-old man

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150730p2a00m0na010000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- Relatives of a 102-year-old man who hanged himself after learning he would have to evacuate from his home village in the wake of meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant requested plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) to accept its responsibility and apologize. "I want TEPCO to think about why a person who lived to 102 years old had to take his own life and understand the value of a human life," Mieko Okubo, 62, daughter-in-law of Fumio Okubo, told a news conference at the Fukushima Prefectural Government building on July 29.

Mieko and two other relatives of Fumio Okubo filed a damages suit against TEPCO on July 29, claiming that Okubo suffered psychological distress due to the prospect of being forced to leave his home in the village of Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture, and that drove him to suicide. They are demanding some 60.5 million yen in the lawsuit filed with the Fukushima District Court.

According to Mieko, Okubo was born and raised in Iitate. He married and had eight children there, and on his 99th birthday nearly a hundred villagers gathered to celebrate the special day.

However his peaceful life was ruined in the nuclear disaster. On April 11, 2011, Okubo was informed about the nuclear evacuation order on TV and learned that his village would be designated as a no-go zone. Okubo told Mieko, who was watching TV with him at the time, "I don't want to leave. I've lived a bit too long." The following morning he was found hanged in his room.

"The village was everything to him. I still shed a tear when I think about the pain he must have felt," Mieko said. "I want TEPCO to admit its responsibility and apologize."

The village of Iitate is still under an evacuation order.

Govt. agrees increase in compensation

July 29, 2015

Fukushima compensation increased to ¥7 trillion

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/07/29/national/fukushima-compensation-increased-%C2%A57-trillion/#.VbiN9_nwmou

Reuters

The government has approved an increase in compensation payments for the Fukushima nuclear crisis to ¥7.07 trillion as tens of thousands of evacuees remain in temporary housing more than four years after the disaster.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. will receive ¥950 billion more in public funds on top of the ¥6.125 trillion agreed earlier, the utility and the government said Tuesday.

The increase, which was agreed following a request by Tepco, adds to the taxpayers' bill for the disaster.

Tepco has faced a stream of legal cases seeking compensation over the triple meltdown at its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Electricity bills for households have also risen 25 percent since the catastrophe as the country resorted to importing more fossil fuels with the gradual shutdown of all reactors for safety checks and upgrades.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's government and Tepco, which was bailed out by taxpayers in 2012, are undertaking an unprecedented decontamination project to lower radiation levels in towns closest to the plant, although some areas will likely remain off-limits for decades.

Inside the plant, Tepco has struggled to bring the situation under control and it is estimated removing the melted fuel from the wrecked reactors and cleaning up the site will cost trillions of yen and take decades to complete.

The government plans to revoke evacuation orders for most people forced from their homes by the disaster within two years as part of a plan to cap compensation payouts and speed up reconstruction.

Residents happy with panel's decision

July 31, 2015

Residents hail indictment decision

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150731_80.html

Jul. 31, 2015 - Updated 09:36 UTC+2

The leader of the residents, Ruiko Muto, has praised the panel's decision.

Muto said she believes a court will determine who was responsible for the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster and give a fair judgment.

She said that 110,000 people are still unable to return to their homes. She added that having the former executives face a criminal trial will help prevent a recurrence and create a society in which people can live in peace.

The residents' lawyer, Hiroyuki Kawai, also said that if the former officials had escaped indictment, the real cause of the accident would have been covered up forever.

He expressed hope that the trial will find out more about what caused the nuclear accident.

TEPCO declined to comment on the decision or the criminal complaint that led to it.

But it said in a statement that it wants to renew its heartfelt apology to the people of Fukushima and many others for causing trouble and concern.

The firm said it will do its utmost for compensation, plant decommissioning and decontamination, based on the principle of seeking reconstruction of Fukushima. It added that it is fully resolved to improving the safety of nuclear power plants.

Young evacuee to speak at the U.N.

August 1, 2015

Fukushima high school evacuee to share experiences at United Nations

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201508010022>

By TAKURO NEGISHI/ Staff Writer

IWAKI, Fukushima Prefecture--A high school student who thought she was only temporarily fleeing her home during the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster and remains an evacuee to this day, will address an event at the United Nations headquarters this month.

Ayumi Kikuchi, 16, a former resident of Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture, located near the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant that suffered a triple meltdown, was asked by school officials to give the speech in New York City.

A nonprofit organization that deals with the issues of human rights, health and the environment contacted the prefectural Futaba High School, which now operates out of the nearby city of Iwaki. It invited a student from the prefecture to come and share their experiences of having lived through those trying events and the aftermath.

"At that time, I was a sixth-grader in my elementary school, and we were going to graduate in a few days," Kikuchi says in her speech. "My home was 4 kilometers from the plant. At that time, I didn't understand why we had to leave our home, and I thought we could come back home soon."

However, she has been forced to live in various shelters over the years, including the Saitama Super Arena and one set up at the former Kisai High School in Kazo, Saitama Prefecture.

"I wondered what's going to happen to us (at the time)," she said. She remembered watching the events unfold on the news.

"I went back to my home only once after the accident," she wrote. "There were many houses left collapsed and roads still had cracks. Nothing seemed to have changed since the disaster. However, the inside of my house was totally different from what I remembered because of animal excreta and rain leaking in."

The high school student said she hopes to one day work for the local government to help restore her town to what it once was.

Her school, which has a history of more than 90 years, will close after her class graduates. Four other relocated high schools are also scheduled to close.

"Many graduates are feeling very sorry and regretting that their old school is forced to close even though the school or the students have done nothing wrong themselves," Kikuchi says in her speech.

In her message, Kikuchi will call on people to help one another in times of disaster. She also plans to ask people to share and pass on the memories that result from such devastating events.

"I want people to know about Fukushima's situation accurately," she wrote. "People in other countries may think that Fukushima is uninhabitable and may wonder why people don't flee from Fukushima. In fact, however, it is not the entire area of Fukushima Prefecture, but only some regions that people cannot live in. Most of Fukushima is safe to live in. Also, various movements toward reconstruction have been made, and there is a lot of good news about Fukushima too."

Fumi Arimura, an English teacher at Kikuchi's school, helped her write her 10-minute speech. Kikuchi leaves for the United States on Aug. 2.

Short-sighted vision?

July 31, 2015

In major nuclear disasters, mental health the No. 1 casualty, studies find

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/07/31/national/science-health/major-nuclear-disasters-mental-health-key-casualty-studies-find/#.Vbsld_nwmos

Reuters

LONDON – People caught up in a nuclear disaster are more likely to suffer severe psychological disorders such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder rather than harm from radiation, scientists said Friday.

Factors such as having to evacuate their home or simple fear itself contribute to the trauma, the scientists said in studies published in *The Lancet* to mark the 70th anniversary of the U.S. atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The studies counter the misconception that nuclear disasters have caused widespread death and physical illness, with the researchers finding that the mental health effects were far more profound.

"In most nuclear accidents very few people are exposed to a life-threatening dose of radiation," wrote Akira Ohtsuru of **Fukushima Medical University**.

Nuclear accidents are rare but five that were rated as "severe" have occurred during the past 60 years — Russia's Kyshtym in 1957, Windscale in Britain in 1957, Three Mile Island in the United States in 1979, Chernobyl in 1986 and Fukushima in 2011.

Koichi Tanigawa of Fukushima Medical University, who led one of the studies, said the psychological burden for people living in affected regions is often overlooked.

In 2006, the U.N. Chernobyl Forum report found that accident's most serious public health issue was its damage to mental health, an effect made worse by poor communication about the health risks of reported radiation levels.

Even now, 20 years after the accident, rates of depression and PTSD remain higher than normal, the researchers said.

Similar problems were seen after Fukushima, with the proportion of adults with psychological distress almost five times higher among disaster evacuees — at 14.6 percent compared with just 3 percent in the general population.

“Although the radiation dose to the public from Fukushima was relatively low, and **no discernible physical health effects are expected**, psychological and social problems, largely stemming from the differences in risk perceptions, have had a devastating impact on people’s lives,” Tanigawa said. Some 170,000 residents were evacuated from a 30-km radius of the Fukushima plant, the researchers said.

At least a third of the world’s 437 nuclear power plants have even more people living within that distance — 21 have more than 1 million people nearby, and six have more than 3 million.

Radiological health experts said analyzing such events gives vital information on how best to protect those living near nuclear power plants.

TEPCOs indictment makes sense for citizens

August 1, 2015

TEPCO execs' mandatory prosecution reflects the sense among regular citizens

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20150801p2a00m0na008000c.html>

A judicial review board's July 31 announcement that three former Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) executives should be indicted over the 2011 Fukushima nuclear plant meltdowns reflects existing "sense among ordinary people," and emphasizes the weight of responsibilities that have been placed on the senior officials of the plant operator.

The Tokyo No. 5 Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution dismissed the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office's decision to drop cases against TEPCO's former chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata, 75, and two former vice presidents, Ichiro Takekuro, 69, and Sakae Muto, 65 -- claiming that such a decision neglected the significance of the disaster and was based on a false understanding.

Since the committee is made up of 11 citizens, however, its judgment differs from regular prosecution standards. As such, court-appointed attorneys serving as prosecutors are believed to face difficulties in making a good case -- and lengthy trials are expected.

"The committee's report clearly says that the TEPCO executives could have predicted (the disaster)," commented an attorney from a group of lawyers that filed for a review to the committee on behalf of disaster victims. "We have a bright outlook for the trials."

Perhaps the biggest game-changing factor for the public prosecutors' earlier decision not to indict the three former executives was the committee's conclusion that the responsible parties for a nuclear power plant should take into consideration the possibility of a disaster exceeding all expectations, insofar as a nuclear plant accident would result in irreversible effects.

The report emphasized that the TEPCO executives were responsible for preparing for a possible nuclear disaster at the Fukushima plant even though the chance of such an accident was very small -- thereby imposing much greater due diligence on the former utility executives than had the public prosecutors. The fact that the committee referred to a shutdown of the plant to ensure safety was also a notable point.

In order to hold someone criminally liable in cases of negligence, prosecutors must prove that the defendant could predict an accident and avoid its consequences. In the TEPCO case, **the utility's 2008 calculation based on projection by a government earthquake research body -- wherein the highest tsunami waves hitting south of the Fukushima plant were estimated to be 15.7 meters -- drew**

significant attention. The focal point in the case was whether the utility executives acknowledged this estimate and were able to predict the massive tsunami.

The Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office had concluded that prior to the disaster, the officials could not have recognized the tsunami risk whereby the plant's main equipment would become submerged in water. The office claimed that the scale of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami had exceeded the projection by the government research body, and that the projection itself had low credibility.

In response to the public prosecutors' argument, the committee cited the 1986 Chernobyl disaster -- pointing out that a nuclear plant accident could discharge a huge amount of radioactive materials that would in turn affect the preservation of humanity. It went on to say **that parties involved in the operation of nuclear power plants "absolutely cannot ignore" estimates for the highest tsunami, and concluded specifically that the three executives could have predicted the disaster.**

Regarding the avoidance of consequences, the committee argued that the executives should have taken every measure possible -- including the suspension of plant operation -- at least during a period when the utility was working on establishing appropriate tsunami prevention measures. "If the operation had been suspended, the disaster could have been avoided," the report said.

The committee slammed the conclusion wherein the public prosecutors had said that the nuclear accident was unpredictable, and that it could not have been avoided even with waterproof buildings or moving the plant up on higher ground. This was deemed as having "no persuasiveness," and it was concluded that the decision had been "based on a false understanding."

Meanwhile, the executives are facing a class-action suit filed by a group of TEPCO shareholders with the Tokyo District Court, in which the investors are demanding a total of some 5.5 trillion yen from the three, as well as from 24 other former and current TEPCO executives. The 15.7-meter tsunami estimate has also become the point of contention in this lawsuit, with the defendant claiming that the figure was scientifically groundless.

In the criminal trial, which will start as the three executives are facing mandatory prosecution, **the largest points of contention will likely be the scientific credibility of the estimate for tsunami -- as well as how such information was passed to the defendants.** Since court-appointed attorneys serving as prosecutors are allowed to conduct supplementary investigations for mandatory prosecution, they will likely consider interviewing earthquake and tsunami experts, as well as TEPCO employees who were involved in the calculation process.

A number of witnesses are expected to be summoned if the defendants plead not guilty, however, resulting in a prolonged trial.

August 1, 2015

Editorial: Decision to indict ex-TEPCO executives in court over nuclear accident is meaningful

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20150801p2a00m0na009000c.html>

A prosecution inquest panel concluded that the responsibility of former Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) executives who failed to take measures to prevent a nuclear accident at its tsunami-hit Fukushima nuclear plant should be clarified through a criminal trial.

The Tokyo No. 5 Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution recommended that former TEPCO Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata and two former vice presidents, Sakae Muto and Ichiro Takekuro, be prosecuted on

charges of professional negligence resulting in death and injury. This was the second recommendation by the prosecution inquest panel, whose eleven members were selected from among members of the general public.

In 2008, three years before the disaster, TEPCO released its estimate that the atomic power plant could be hit by a tsunami up to 15.7 meters in height. The inquest panel determined that the three former executives failed to take necessary measures, and neglected their duty to prevent a serious accident, even though they knew of this possibility.

The panel's decision stated repeatedly that if a nuclear accident were to occur, it could be a serious disaster -- a position that is completely understandable.

The decision says that **in operating nuclear plants, top priority should be placed on safety measures rather than reducing expenses.** Citing nuclear plant accidents overseas, the decision emphasizes that TEPCO should have taken sufficient measures to protect the power station from tsunami, even though such disasters are extremely rare.

Even so, the point of contention in proving that the three committed professional negligence is whether or not they could have predicted and prevented the disaster. The panel's decision takes seriously the responsibility of the three as the top-ranking executives of the utility that operates the Fukushima plant. The decision recognizes that **the executives had been informed regarding the company's forecast that a higher tsunami than previously estimated could possibly hit the power station -- and concludes that they could have implemented countermeasures as a result.**

Prosecutors who had decided not to indict the three had deemed that they could not have specifically predicted the risks of tsunami hitting the plant because of the forecast's lack of reliability. However, the inquest panel dismissed this conclusion as unconvincing.

A court will judge whether the three have criminal responsibility for the nuclear disaster.

However, it is of great significance that those representing citizens have concluded twice that the three should be brought to justice.

Several years have passed since the executive and legislative branches' investigative committees on the nuclear crisis were disbanded. Only part of TEPCO insiders' testimonies on the accident has been disclosed.

As such, many people who have been affected by the nuclear crisis are wondering why the accident was not prevented.

Even though the trial of the three former TEPCO executives is not aimed at clarifying the cause of the accident, it is hoped that testimonies provided by the three, as well as from witnesses, will help answer the many questions from disaster victims. During the hearings, moreover, the executives should sincerely describe the roles that they played in managing the utility.

The prosecution inquest panel's decision was in response to a criminal complaint filed by long-term Fukushima evacuees, including one who died during hospitalization. Many victims will pay close attention to the court proceedings, and the responsibility of court-appointed lawyers -- who will act as prosecutors during the trial -- is extremely heavy. Prosecutors should fully cooperate with the lawyers during the trial proceedings.

TEPCO's indictment: A sense of justice

August 1, 2015

Indictment of TEPCO trio encourages Fukushima nuclear accident victims

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201508010032>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Finally, there is a sense of justice in the air over who should take responsibility for the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

A July 31 decision by a citizens' panel to indict three former executives of plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. has given renewed hope to victims that they will get the answers they have been looking for. The decision to indict marked the second time an independent judicial panel of citizens has overturned earlier decisions by prosecutors not to indict.

For the first time, a criminal trial will be held to determine the responsibility of TEPCO executives for the disaster.

Ruiko Muto, 61, who heads a group pursuing the criminal responsibility of TEPCO and government officials, was overcome with emotion when she learned of the decision.

"Even today, 110,000 residents (in Fukushima Prefecture) cannot return to their homes," Muto said.

"Unless the truth is revealed, the victims will not feel rewarded for all the trouble they have been through."

With regard to the three former executives who were indicted, Muto said, "I hope they will reveal the entire truth in the courtroom as to why that accident happened."

Hiroyuki Kawai, who heads the team of lawyers working with Muto's group, said: "If this had ended with a decision not to indict, the real truth about the accident would have been forever buried in darkness. There is a major significance in the decision to indict based on the sense of justice held by ordinary citizens."

In its decision, the citizens' panel noted that in the years before the accident TEPCO's bottom line was worsening.

"There was concern that if measures were taken on work to deal with (a potential) tsunami at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, the financial situation would be further hurt," the panel said.

Yuichi Kaido, another lawyer, said the latest decision took greater account of TEPCO's financial background.

"The contents were much deeper than the decision made by the first citizens' panel (in July 2014)," he said.

Many of those still trying to cope with the aftermath of the Fukushima accident were unsure whether they would see any immediate improvement in their day-to-day lives.

Reiko Hachisuka, 63, who lives in temporary housing in Aizu-Wakamatsu, Fukushima Prefecture, welcomed the decision to indict. She said many people will never be satisfied until responsibility for the accident is made clear.

An evacuee from Okuma, Hachisuka joined the Diet's Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission as a representative of disaster victims.

"Even if a few people are tried in court, that will not lead to an end to our lives as evacuees," she said. Of the 110,000 Fukushima residents who fled their homes, about 45,000 currently live outside the prefecture.

"I hope everyone realizes there is no direct relationship between the court case and the rebuilding of Fukushima," Hachisuka said. "Nothing will be resolved by making a judgment about someone's responsibility. The problem is much deeper."

Yuichi Manome, 52, an official with the Iwaki city fishing cooperative, said, "Damage continues to be inflicted on Fukushima even today. I hope a clear decision is made in the court."

The Iwaki fishing cooperative resumed the harvesting of sea urchins on July 30 on an experimental basis.

Manome suggested that **the failure to clarify the responsibility of TEPCO executives helped fuel moves to resume operations at other nuclear plants.**

"Despite the magnitude of the accident, no one has been asked to take responsibility," Manome said. "That leads to the thinking that perhaps the accident never happened in the first place."

The Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office and TEPCO issued statements saying there would be no direct comment on the decision made by the citizens' panel.

Moriumius projet

August 2, 2015

Moriumius project brings young life and learning back to the Tohoku disaster zone

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2015/08/02/how-tos/moriumius-project-brings-young-life-learning-back-tohoku-disaster-zone/#.Vb8iH_nwmot

by Rob Gilhooly

ISHINOMAKI, MIYAGI PREF. – From a hillside above Ogatsu Bay drifts a sound that vanished from the area 4½ years ago.

The crescendo of children's giggles and excited squeals seems incongruous with what lies below, where the landscape is void of life, erased as it was by the March 2011 tsunami like chalk from a blackboard.

But in the playground of a once-deserted school, children are climbing trees, removing weeds from a rice paddy and carrying wood for a stove. Third-grader Daiki Yokota has spotted a small fish in the pond near the school entrance, while 7-year-old Sawa Kurahashi is chasing a butterfly.

Soon, each of them is ushered into classrooms to make their own chopsticks from wood collected from the surrounding forest. There's not a game console or smartphone in sight.

"I love making things but right now my hands feel like they are going to fall off," says Hana Yamamoto, 11, as she shaves off another layer of wood with a chisel. "I can't wait to try using them at dinner."

Yamamoto was one of 13 elementary school-age children forming the first intake of a unique educational project that aims to revitalize the Miyagi town of Ogatsu, which lost around 80 percent of its buildings and 10 percent of its 4,300 population to the disasters.

The Moriumius-Lusail project officially opened its doors on July 18 for a one-week summer camp with a difference.

“We wanted to make a place where children can stay, interact with the locals, enjoy the natural environment and learn about sustainability in an organic way,” says Gentaro Yui, director of Sweet Treat 311, an NPO focused on rebuilding communities affected by the 3/11 disasters through education projects.

At the heart of Moriumius is the 93-year-old Kuwahama Elementary School, which closed its doors in 2002 due to an already declining child population in the three communities it served.

Yui came across the school following the 2011 disasters, when he got involved in a volunteer project delivering food and other emergency supplies started by close friend Takeshi Tachibana.

While restaurant business consultant Tachibana looked to apply his expertise in the food industry to assist the battered local fisheries industry, Yui set about finding a way to bring younger people back to the area.

“The population of Ogatsu had fallen below 1,000 and children were studying 40 km away,” says Yui, who helped establish the KidZania “edutainment” theme park in Tokyo back in 2004. “The more I spoke with local people, the more I understood what a crucial role that school had once played in the community.” Two years of renovations ensued, which included digging out a meter-thick layer of sludge and elevating the entire school in order to lay new foundations. Some 5,000 volunteers, many of them businesspeople from Tokyo and further afield, gave up weekends to lend a hand.

“It was in a bit of a mess, to put it mildly,” says Keisuke Tanasawa, who helped with the renovation project on days off from his job at a Tokyo headhunting company, bringing along 80 of his friends. “Seeing the children here laughing and smiling makes it all seem very worthwhile.”

From a distance the wooden building retains all the trademark features of a small rural Japan school — right down to the original clock above the entrance. But a closer look reveals subtle changes: Former classrooms have been tastefully converted into girls’ and boys’ dormitories, while the dining room, whose large sliding outer doors open up onto a broad wooden deck, would not look out of place in a trendy part of Tokyo.

The facility is also designed to be self-sustaining and eco-friendly. The *rotenburo* outdoor baths are heated using wood from the surrounding forest, while rice is grown in the grounds for consumption at the facility. A unique filtering system allows drainage water to be recycled and solar panels are on a list of future additions to the site — as are pigs, other animals and crops.

But while the school is a powerful symbol of intent, it is what goes on outside that forms the core of the Moriumius concept. A large part of the weeklong program involves putting participants in teams and encouraging them to discover, by themselves, the important role of the natural environment — in particular, the importance of the nutrient-rich forests to the local fisheries industry, which is renowned for its aquaculture. Indeed, the project name itself is a combination of three words aimed at emphasizing this concept — *mori* (forest), *umi* (sea) and “us.”

During a trek along a mountain stream, Riki Hatakeyama, 12, and Alex Montgomery, 10, chase after small crabs that skitter from beneath moss-covered rocks.

“I didn’t know that crabs lived in mountain streams,” said Montgomery, who lives in the Tokyo area and whose father is British. “The trek was hard, but I learned a lot about the need to keep streams clean to protect nature.”

Another aim of the program is to give out-of-classroom experience in using English, and non-Japanese volunteers form a part of the team of guides and instructors. Yui is also keen to raise awareness of the impact of natural disasters on rural communities, and he believes such a sustainable learning experience for children, particularly those living in urban areas, will bolster the chances of recovery in such communities.

“Ogatsu is a place where the forest and the sea are relatively close to one another, so you don’t have to be here long to grasp the natural cycle here,” he says. “It’s an unusual experience for children who are blessed with all the conveniences of modern society, and I believe that bringing not just local children, but others from outside the region and even from overseas, will have an important economic and psychological impact on the community.”

Details on upcoming programs and other information can be found on the Moriumius-Lusail website: www.moriumius.jp. Information for foreigners on how to volunteer on the programs can be found on the Association for Japan Exchange & Teaching (AJET) website: ajet.net. Your questions and comments: lifelines@japantimes.co.jp

Preserving memories for posterity



“Frottage” artist Masao Okabe traces the inscriptions of a stone monument for farmland development in Minami-Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, in June. (Toshihide Ueda)

INSIGHT: Physical sense helps preserve memories of 2011 triple disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/column/AJ201508040004>

By TOSHIHIDE UEDA/ Senior Staff Writer

MINAMI-SOMA, Fukushima Prefecture--A salty smell struck my nose as I descended from my car. The Pacific Ocean loomed about 4 kilometers ahead as I looked toward the east from Yasakajinja shrine near the northern end of this northeastern city.

Damp winds from the sea stuck to my skin.

I was told this area used to lie on the waterside. People worked hard since the old times to reclaim land and develop rice paddies.

I found a stone monument by the side of a nearby village with engravings that read, "In memory of farmland development." The development of the farmland, which covered a total area of slightly more than 40 hectares, was completed in 1926. The rice paddies in front of the monument, which were probably developed around the same time, were left dilapidated and covered in weeds.

The gigantic tsunami generated by the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011, swamped Pacific coastal areas in Fukushima Prefecture, including here. The prefectural government's count of "direct deaths" from the tsunami and quake stood at 1,604 as of June 23. The city of Minami-Soma accounted for 525 of those deaths, the largest among all municipalities in the prefecture.

The death toll in Minami-Soma exceeds 1,100 if those still unaccounted for but registered as dead, "associated deaths," and other cases are counted in.

HUMAN STRUGGLES WITH MOTHER NATURE

I was in that area of Minami-Soma to watch how artist Masao Okabe worked on his piece.

Since 2012, the 72-year-old artist living in Kita-Hiroshima, Hokkaido, has been producing works of "frottage" in disaster-hit areas of Fukushima Prefecture, in a joint project with the Fukushima Museum. He lays sheets of paper against objects, which are witnesses to local history or retain scars of the 2011 disaster, and then rubs over them with chalk, pencils or other drawing material to reproduce patterns of the uneven surfaces.

The piece he was working on that day was themed on "land reclamation," or a struggle between the activity of humans, who are eager to expand their territory, and Mother Nature. Reclaimed land certainly represents a venue of such confrontation. And the stone monument for the farmland development is also a witness to this history.

But people's memories do fade with time. Only when "walls" built by humans, such as embankments or seawalls, have been broken by a tsunami do humans belatedly remember that the history of their struggle with Mother Nature still continues.

"We must ask, for example, why a particular area suffered damage," Okabe said. "Wasn't the disaster induced by land reclamation? How are humans associated with that locality? What is the role that locality is thought to have played in history? We should ask those questions from a grand perspective."

Okabe used the same approach when he produced his most important pair of works, both themed on Hiroshima, where he rubbed over surfaces along an approach to the Peace Memorial Park and over curbs on platforms at Ujina Station of the former Japanese National Railways.

Huge numbers of soldiers and vast loads of munitions were sent to battlefields via Ujina, a gateway to a naval port, over a half century from the First Sino-Japanese War to World War II. Hiroshima, therefore, doubles as a venue of "suffering" and as a base of "aggression" that induced that suffering.

I came to realize something as I watched Okabe at work: the power of physical sense.

When I ran my finger on a sheet of paper laid against the stone monument, I had the impression that subtle changes in its unevenness were telling me about the history of the monument itself--the weathering of its surface with time, scars probably from being dragged about by the tsunami, heating in the sun and cooling in the winds.

“Physically touching an object revives the relationship I have with that object,” Okabe said. “Doing so also brings time back to life.”

The sheet of paper flexed a little, probably from exposure to damp winds, while the artist was rubbing it against the monument. The uneven contours, reproduced with chalk, became slightly blurred. Well, that was also the result of an interaction between a human and an object.

The salty smell suddenly receded. Winds were beginning to blow from land to sea. That was another reminder that we were standing at a venue of confrontation between human activity and Mother Nature.

PINES A WITNESS TO NUCLEAR DISASTER

How could we keep records of the memory of the 2011 quake and tsunami, which also triggered the Fukushima nuclear disaster, and hand them down to posterity? Something came to my mind as I was asking myself that question: a pair of pine trees that grow near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The trees stand some 10 meters from each other on a vacant lot of land in the Ottozawa district of the town of Okuma, where the Ottozawa branch of Kumamachi Elementary School once stood. Hisao Sato, who grew up there and later became head of a district community, said he attended the branch school in bare feet.

The 77-year-old said the pair of pine trees served as a “substitute main gate.” Children went through the gap between the trees to enter the premises of the branch school.

“In the past, senior town government officials made the rounds of influential townspeople to borrow money when the town government ran out of cash,” Sato said.

The town was so poor, but all that changed drastically when the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant was built. Roads and other infrastructure were built or upgraded, and the branch school was integrated with the main school in 1971, the year the nuclear plant’s No. 1 reactor entered commercial operations.

Then came the nuclear disaster. The pine trees have seen all that history.

The old site of the branch school lies on the planned site of an “interim storage facility” for long-term storage of radioactive waste from cleanup work. I am concerned the pair of pine trees could be felled.

I would only wish that at least the tactile feel of their bark could be preserved for posterity to share and relive with their physical sense.

* * *

The author, based in Fukushima, wrote on other issues.

Don’t let nuclear disaster be forgotten like great Fukushima monk

Fondness for the ‘earth’ guided Fukushima couple displaced by nuke disaster

‘Wishful thinking’ of nuclear insiders must not be allowed to be reborn

Depopulated areas in Fukushima learned bitter lessons from dams

Utilities running a shell game in relying on nuclear power over renewable energy

Fukushima battling utilities’ ‘no more green energy’ decision

In age of LEDs, utilities thinking in incandescent-bulb mode

Fukushima’s micro-hydropower ambitions face challenges

Fukushima alive with seeds of industrial innovation

Radioactive pollution endangers cultures of Tohoku mountain communities

Abnormal changes in small birds and the role of science

Disaster-hit Tohoku communities search for a renewable way

Serious safety concerns subsist

August 8, 2015

EDITORIAL: Concerns about evacuations in nuclear emergencies continue unabated

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201508080033>

The 2011 nuclear disaster resulted in a horrifying scenario in which nuclear fuel inside reactors melted down, triggering a massive release of radioactive materials into the environment outside the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has proposed a system of five layers of safety measures for nuclear power plants. The nuclear watchdog urges each country operating nuclear power plants to adopt this approach, known as “defense-in-depth,” to ensure the facilities operate safely.

The final barrier in this system is prevention of radiation exposure to people living in areas around nuclear power plants.

Specifically, **this fifth and final stage of defense-in-depth should be implemented in the form of plans developed by the central and local governments to mitigate the consequences of nuclear accidents and evacuate local residents.**

When the Fukushima disaster occurred, however, no effective plan existed for the mass evacuation of local residents in Japan. This is because the possibility of a severe nuclear accident had been ruled out.

As a result, the accident triggered utter chaos in local communities around the Fukushima plant.

Now, more than four years since the disaster unfolded, Kyushu Electric Power Co.’s Sendai nuclear power plant in Kagoshima Prefecture is expected to restart its No. 1 reactor as early as Aug. 11.

But the mitigation and evacuation plans currently in place are far from reassuring to local residents. The responsibility to establish the “final barrier” and ensure the safety of residents rests with the local government. There should be no headlong rush toward restarting the reactor when serious safety concerns persist.

SERIOUSNESS OF EVACUATION PLANS QUESTIONED

After the Fukushima accident, the central government made it mandatory for all local governments within 30 kilometers of a nuclear power plant to develop disaster mitigation and evacuation plans.

All the nine municipalities within 30 km of the Sendai plant have drawn up such plans. The total population of the areas covered is about 210,000.

Takuro Eto, 58, who operates a daytime care service for the elderly in Ichikikushikino, a city located about 17 km from the Sendai plant, is deeply skeptical about the evacuation plan crafted by the municipal government.

“Are they really serious about protecting the lives of people?” he said.

Many of the 10 or so elderly people who regularly come to Eto’s facility are suffering from dementia. If a serious nuclear accident occurs, they are required to return to their homes before being evacuated, according to the city’s evacuation plan. One of these patients lives alone in a house located within 10 km of the plant.

“Are we supposed to have this patient return home, which is located closer to the plant?” Eto said indignantly. “How can we ask our staffers to escort the patient home (in such an emergency)?”

How to evacuate people who cannot move on their own, such as the residents of nursing homes and hospital inpatients, also poses a challenge.

The Kagoshima prefectural government has secured evacuation destinations for the 17 nursing homes and hospitals within 10 km of the Sendai plant. As for the 227 facilities located between 10 and 30 km from the plant, however, the local government has decided to do computer searches after an accident happens to find facilities that can accommodate those evacuees.

An employee at a home for elderly people requiring special care located within a 30-km radius of the nuclear plant voices anxiety about the plan.

"We have only one staff member on night duty," the employee said. "How can the staffer deal with evacuating the residents to an unfamiliar place in an emergency?"

Despite such concerns, the prefectural government has no plan to carry out an evacuation drill involving local residents to test the effectiveness of the evacuation plan before the reactor is brought back online.

"Kyushu Electric Power currently has no time (for such a drill) as it is busy with inspections prior to the reactor restart," Kagoshima Governor Yuichi Ito said.

An Asahi Shimbun survey revealed that 66 percent of medical institutions and 49 percent of social welfare facilities within 30 km of nuclear power plants across Japan have not compiled mandatory evacuation plans specifying evacuation destinations, routes and transportation means to be used in the event of an accident.

DIALOGUE WITH LOCAL RESIDENTS ESSENTIAL

The fifth level of the IAEA's defense-in-depth safety approach--the final barrier--should be designed to work effectively to protect public health even in cases in which all the other four layers of defense have failed.

In Japan, this stage of defense is the local government's responsibility. Evacuation plans are not covered by the Nuclear Regulation Authority's safety assessments. Such plans are to be simply approved by the nuclear disaster prevention council, headed by the prime minister.

It should be assumed that the responsibility for protecting local residents from nuclear accidents lies with the local government, which is abreast of special regional circumstances.

According to experts, in the disaster at the Fukushima No.1 plant, even the nuclear fuel pool of the No. 4 reactor, which was offline at that time, was at risk of a severe accident.

One vital lesson from the catastrophe is that the mere existence of a nuclear reactor poses serious safety risks.

Evacuation plans are indispensable, whether the reactors are restarted or not.

To be sure, it is almost impossible to create a perfect evacuation plan. But it is possible to clarify what can be done, ascertain problems to be solved and explain them to local residents.

To do so, the local governments of areas where nuclear plants are located need to conduct drills to test the effectiveness of their mitigation and evacuation plans and hold the necessary dialogue with local residents.

It is said that a two-stage evacuation approach is effective during nuclear emergencies. Under this approach, residents within 5 km of the plant should be evacuated first. People living between 5 and 30 km from the plant should first take refuge indoors to wait for their own evacuation.

It is obvious that this approach does not work without the understanding and cooperation of the local residents.

If local governments are responsible for the safety of their residents, they should also be involved in the process of deciding on whether to restart reactors.

Currently, however, under agreements with electric utilities, only the prefectures and municipalities that host nuclear power plants have the right to agree to reactor restarts. But this

right should also be given at least to all the local governments in the 30-km zone that are obliged to map out evacuation plans.

Nuclear reactors should be considered to be too dangerous if the local governments of areas that can be affected by accidents involving the reactors refuse to support their operations. These reactors should be decommissioned as soon as possible.

CONTINUED FAILURE TO ACT

The Diet's investigative committee that looked into the Fukushima accident has pointed out that little serious effort has been made in Japan to establish even the fourth level of the IAEA's defense-in-depth strategy for nuclear safety, or control of severe plant conditions, the stage before the final barrier.

In 2006, the Nuclear Safety Commission tried to make a sweeping review based on the IAEA standards of the priority areas designated under the government's nuclear disaster prevention policy. But the plan was dropped in the face of opposition from the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, which feared such a review would provoke anxiety among local residents, according to the findings of the investigation. The radiation exposure that afflicted many residents around the Fukushima plant could have been avoided. Many patients in hospitals who were not evacuated quickly enough died due to deteriorating health conditions. More than 1,900 people in Fukushima Prefecture have died due to causes related to the nuclear accident.

Have all the relevant lessons from the calamity been gleaned and absorbed to prevent any further casualties of administrative nonfeasance?

This is the question local governments should ask first in examining and evaluating their abilities to protect residents from nuclear accidents.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Aug. 8

Fukushima fishermen okay water discharge into sea



Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in May (Asahi Shimbun file photo)

August 11, 2015

Fukushima fishermen give nod to TEPCO's plan to release treated water into sea

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201508110060>

By SUSUMU OKAMOTO/ Staff Writer

Fisherman operating in waters close to the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant formally approved a plan by plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. to discharge radioactive groundwater into the ocean after decontamination treatment.

The Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations gave the green light to TEPCO's "subdrain plan" at an extraordinary meeting on Aug. 11.

TEPCO is expected to start discharging treated water as early as next month.

It will pump contaminated groundwater accumulating in areas around reactors damaged by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster for processing and then release it into the sea.

The fishermen's federation submitted a written request to the central government and TEPCO setting certain conditions for giving its approval to the subdrain plan. It warned the utility against discharging highly radioactive water inside the reactor buildings even after decontamination treatment and called for strict monitoring of standards for the release of water. It also insisted on compensation in the event the local fishing industry suffers losses as a result of groundless rumors.

Many fishermen initially opposed the TEPCO plan as processed radioactive water had never been discharged into the ocean.

TEPCO's delay in disclosing the leakage of radioactive water into the sea each time it rained heavily also hampered its negotiations with local fishermen as it undermined their confidence in the company. The matter only came to light in February.

TEPCO then made an intensive effort to explain the subdrain plan would help reduce the flow of contaminated underground water into the ocean. This convinced the prefectural fishermen's federation that the work could drastically decrease radiation levels in nearby waters, prompting it sign off on the plan.

Fukushima fishermen to allow discharge into sea

Aug. 11, 2015 - Updated 07:16 UTC+2

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150811_24.html

Fukushima's fisheries federation is planning to conditionally allow decontaminated underground water from the crippled nuclear power plant to be discharged into the sea.

In exchange, it has asked the government and the operator of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant to take measures to prevent negative harmful rumors.

The Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Fisheries Co-operative Associations reached this decision on Tuesday after a conditional agreement by a fishermen's group in Iwaki City.

The group handed a written request to officials from the central government and TEPCO.

It is asking that strict operational standards be observed for the discharge and that the process be subject to monitoring by a third party. It also asks that compensation be paid for harmful rumors.

Tokyo Electric Power Company is planning to pump up contaminated ground water from wells near the reactor buildings, decontaminate the water, and then release it into the ocean.

This measure will be taken to deal with the 300 tons of contaminated water that is being produced at the facility every day.

But TEPCO's plan has been suspended. In February, local distrust of the operator mounted after it was found to have failed to disclose leaks of contaminated rainwater into the ocean.

The federation's chairman Tetsu Nozaki said it was a very troubling decision, but measures to deal with the contaminated water are necessary. He said they will make a final decision after receiving a response.

TEPCO's Tsunemasa Niitsuma said they appreciate the understanding of the plan, and will try to respond quickly.

Subsidies for idled plants will be lowered

August 12, 2015

Grants to local bodies hosting idled nuclear reactors to be lowered

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150811p2a00m0na010000c.html>

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry is set to cut back on subsidies to local governments home to idled nuclear reactors in **an attempt to pressure them into reactivating the reactors**, it has been learned. Starting in fiscal 2016, the ministry will revise grant amounts based on the operational rate of nuclear plants and other factors. Currently, the grants are allocated to local governments hosting nuclear stations that are suspended for safety reasons by deeming their operational rate to be 81 percent across the board. Under the planned new criteria, the deemed operational rate will be set for the respective nuclear plants based on their past performances prior to the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant -- which stood at an average 70 percent. Because the deemed operational rate is applied to nuclear plants nationwide that have remained offline since the onset of the Fukushima crisis, the government's move may prompt local bodies to call for reactivating reactors in their jurisdictions out of fear for reduced subsidies.

According to the industry ministry, the planned measure is aimed at ensuring fairness among local governments home to nuclear power stations after the Aug. 11 reactivation of Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai Nuclear Power Plant in Kagoshima Prefecture -- so that the amount of subsidies to local governments with restarted reactors will not be less than those to local bodies with idled reactors. Under the current system, local governments receive grants whose amounts reflect the operational performance of reactors from two fiscal years back -- which will be changed to 1.5 fiscal years back from fiscal 2016. From fiscal 2013 onwards, municipalities have received grants based on the deemed operational rate at 81 percent as many of the reactors they host were suspended for regular inspections by the end of fiscal 2011 in the wake of the Fukushima meltdowns and still remain offline. The uniform 81 percent rate corresponds to the full operational rate except for the regular inspection period once every 13 months.

The ministry started reviewing the grant system after an expert panel to the ministry drew up a report in December last year calling for ensuring fairness among municipalities hosting nuclear plants. The new deemed operational rate will be set at no more than 81 percent and will take into account the operational performance at each nuclear plant prior to the Fukushima meltdowns. Unless reactors are brought back online, grants to each municipality are destined to be cut back.

As many municipalities hosting nuclear stations heavily depend on the grants and other revenues related to nuclear power, they have called on the ministry to maintain the existing deemed operational rate system. The Mihama Municipal Government in Fukui Prefecture -- more than 40 percent of whose revenues in fiscal 2014 were related to nuclear power including the grants for local bodies hosting reactors at 1.49 billion yen -- has already anticipated that the grant amounts will be halved from fiscal

2016 due to the decommissioning of the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors at the Mihama Nuclear Power Plant operated by Kansai Electric Power Co. "If the deemed operational rate is to be brought down on top of this, there will be growing calls for reactivating reactors," said a municipal government official. Hisao Ito, a special researcher at the Tokyo Jichi Kenkyu Center (Autonomy Tokyo) who is specialized in local government finance, commented, "Under the current scheme where the grant amounts are decided at the discretion of the central government, local governments will not be able to break away from finances dependent on such subsidies. Municipalities should cultivate regional resources other than nuclear power generation, while the central government should support them through impact mitigation measures such as those for former coal mining areas."

Not everyone worries about restart

August 12, 2015

Tears, fears, whoops of joy as Sendai reactor restarted

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201508120060

August 12, 2015

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

SATSUMA-SENDAI, Kagoshima Prefecture--Some residents wept as Kyushu Electric Power Co. started up the Sendai nuclear power plant's No. 1 reactor on Aug. 11, while others applauded the decision.

It was the first reactor in Japan to come back online since operations came to a halt nationwide nearly two years ago in the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011.

About 200 people gathered in front of the main gate of the Sendai plant on Aug. 11 to protest the restart.

Calls of "Kyushu Electric has no respect for life," and "Remember Fukushima," were heard as the demonstrators took turns speaking into microphones to voice their concerns.

The loudest outcry came at 10:30 a.m., when Kyushu Electric Power started up the No. 1 reactor. Some of the protesters were in tears.

More than 200 police officers were deployed at the site in case of trouble.

The reactor was the first facility to receive approval for restart after passing stricter safety regulations instituted after the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

It was the first of Japan's 43 reactors to be brought back online, ending a period with no nuclear power in the nation that had lasted one year and 11 months.

"Our lives will be threatened if radiation leaks," said a 48-year-old woman from Aira, Kagoshima Prefecture, who attended the protest with her junior and senior high school student daughters. "It's highly irrational that our voices are being ignored."

Elsewhere, some restaurant and hotel operators in Satsuma-Sendai voiced their support for the reactor's restart.

"People from all over Japan will come and visit the plant. I'm looking forward to it," said a man in his 40s who runs a hotel.

"As long as they're safe, we believe nuclear power plants are necessary in vitalizing local economies," added Hideo Iwakiri, the mayor of Satsuma-Sendai.

Oochan dolls in Europe

August 17, 2015

Doll mascot for evacuated Fukushima town winning hearts in Europe

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201508170024>



Oochan dolls exhibited at the Museo del Giocattolo in Zagarolo, Italy (Provided by the Okiagari-Koboshi project secretariat)

By YOSHITAKA ITO/ Staff Writer

Kumamon, the ubiquitous bear mascot of Kumamoto Prefecture, has a Japanese rival--at least in Europe. The smaller Oochan mascot for Okuma, a town in Fukushima Prefecture, is rising in popularity there because of its connections to the 2011 accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. In late June, the Oochan dolls went on display at the Museo del Giocattolo, an Italian toy museum in Zagarolo, east of Rome.

All the residents of Okuma evacuated in the wake of the nuclear disaster, and the town's bear mascot has taken on a new significance for the town because it has been turned into a traditional Okiagari-Koboshi doll that is a specialty of the prefecture's Aizu district.

The weighted bottom of the doll helps it return to an upright position after being tipped over, symbolic of the effort by Fukushima residents to get back on their feet following the disaster.

Three Oochan dolls are on display at the Zagarolo museum alongside other Okiagari-Koboshi dolls that were painted by European actors and designers as their way of not forgetting the Fukushima nuclear accident.

The painting project is the brainchild of fashion designer Kenzo Takada, who lives and works out of Paris.

Among the 150 dolls on display at the museum are ones painted by the actors Alain Delon and Jean Reno as well as fashion designer Jean Paul Gaultier.

The Oochan dolls have been produced from this year by those who formerly lived in Okuma. The original intent of making the Okiagari-Koboshi dolls based on the Oochan mascot was to present them as a gift of appreciation to those who have helped evacuees from Okuma adjust to their new lives.

Takada heard about the Oochan project and asked Okuma town government officials if they were interested in participating in an exhibition in Rome in March.

"All residents of Okuma are still living as evacuees. I hope that this exhibition will serve to expand the circle of friendship for those supporting Okuma throughout the world," Takada was quoted as saying at the exhibition.

For the opening of the Zagarolo exhibition, an Internet connection was set up linking the Italian museum and the temporary Okuma town government office in Aizu-Wakamatsu.

"I thank all of you for inviting Oochan to your exhibition," said Hideyuki Sakuma, a Okuma town government official. "It is a mascot that represents Okuma, which is striving to stand up once again after the disaster."

The Okuma town government is now considering putting Oochan goods on sale.

"Although we do feel a sense of crisis that the nuclear accident will be forgotten, Oochan will do everything to transmit the accident to the world," Sakuma said.

According to the secretariat that is handling Takada's project, there are plans to hold an exhibition of Oochan dolls in Paris next year.

"Home" for Bon festival

August 14, 2015

Fukushima evacuees return home during Bon to visit ancestors' graves

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201508140038>

By YOSHITAKA ITO/ Staff Writer

OKUMA, Fukushima Prefecture--Clad in masks, caps and other protective gear, a handful of evacuees from the Fukushima nuclear disaster returned to their hometown here to pay their respects at the graves of their ancestors.

Kuniyuki Sakuma, 65, and his wife, Reiko, 66, visited the tomb of Sakuma's father on Aug. 13, located just 500 meters from the embattled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. Their visit coincided with the traditional Bon festival in which people stop by their ancestors' graves.

Sakuma and his wife remain evacuated in Iwaki, also in the prefecture, due to the lingering high levels of radiation in Okuma. About 110,000 people remain evacuated from their homes in Fukushima Prefecture. A year after the onset of the 2011 nuclear disaster, Sakuma's father, Kunimaru, died of a ruptured aneurysm while living in temporary housing as an evacuee. Kunimaru had taken great pride in running a successful pear farm in Okuma and often expressed his desire to return to his farm.

Although his tomb is currently in Okuma, Kunimaru's final resting place remains unknown as the grave site is marked for the construction of an interim facility to store contaminated soil and material from cleanup efforts at localities surrounding the nuclear plant.

Sakuma said the Environment Ministry has provided no information on what will become of his father's tomb.

On Aug. 13, airborne radiation levels at the grave site measured more than 100 times the levels in Iwaki. Sakuma said he understands that returning to Okuma to live is unrealistic. But he added that he cannot readily abandon the land where his parents once resided.

During their one-hour visit, Sakuma and his wife also stopped by their Okuma home to find their garden overrun with weeds.

"I wonder if my father would be upset if I move the grave somewhere else," Sakuma said. "I would not have to be worried about this kind of thing if the nuclear disaster had not occurred in the first place."

Music for Fukushima youths

August 18, 2015

Led by Greek-born pianist, Fukushima student orchestra set to debut in Tokyo

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201508180050>



Panos Karan, a Britain-based concert pianist, works with junior high and high school students in Fukushima Prefecture. (Provided by Fumiko Tanaka)

By JUNKO YOSHIDA/ Senior Staff Writer

When Greek concert pianist Panos Karan performed for evacuees following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster, he received a renewed awareness of the power of music.

He said he came to know anew the importance of music to humans after seeing students trying to practice, despite the extent of the suffering they were experiencing.

Those visits led Karan to help found the Fukushima Youth Sinfonietta, consisting of 51 students from seven junior high and high schools in the prefecture.

The orchestra will perform its first concert in Tokyo on Aug. 20 at the Tokyo Opera City Concert Hall in Shinjuku Ward.

Karan will join the young musicians in performing Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2. The students will also perform pieces by Bach, Sibelius and Elgar.

Tetsuji Honna, a conductor based in Vietnam and originally from Fukushima Prefecture, will direct the concert.

The Britain-based Karan, 32, formed a connection with Fukushima after he visited there in the summer of 2011, shortly after the triple disasters, at the invitation of his Japanese friends.

Karan played the piano at temporary housing for evacuees and hospitals to encourage the affected people. Since then, Karan has visited the prefecture with his music colleagues every six months to work with the local students.

He also arranged a joint concert in London by the Fukushima Youth Sinfonietta and the renowned Orpheus Sinfonia in March 2014 through the participation of 37 Fukushima students.

Karan said he realized that healing emotional scars left by the disaster will take a lot longer than rebuilding the stricken communities, citing a female student of the orchestra who sobbed convulsively backstage after the concert.

The girl, who was a leader among the students, had rarely shown signs of despondency until then, always appearing cheerful.

Karan said while some children may appear fine on the surface, they may have been unable to envision a life beyond the disaster. He would like them to derive the strength to overcome their difficulties by playing music together, he added.

One in 4 ready to sell their plots for waste storage

August 20, 2015

25% of Fukushima landowners ready to sell plots for contaminated debris storage

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201508200044>

By YOSHITAKA ITO/ Staff Writer

FUKUSHIMA--One in four landowners from localities around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant have shown a willingness to sell their plots to allow for construction of a facility to temporarily store radioactive soil from cleanup work.

Many of them agreed to pre-sale land surveys apparently because they doubt they will ever be able to return to live in their homes due to lingering high radiation levels.

The Environment Ministry plans to build the facility on a 16-square-kilometer site straddling the towns of Okuma and Futaba in Fukushima Prefecture, which co-host the nuclear plant.

Overall, 2,365 people own plots to be purchased.

The ministry said that by the end of July 570 of 850 landowners it had contacted agreed to cooperate with land surveys to evaluate the value of their plots as an initial step toward land acquisition.

The landowners in essence accepted the ministry's guidelines for compensation with regard to the land purchase.

Ministry officials have been contacting landowners since September last year.

Surveys have been finished for plots owned by 300 individuals. But **only five sales contracts have been concluded due to a shortage of ministry workers on the project.**

The storage facility is expected to hold a maximum 22 million cubic meters of contaminated soil and debris up to spring 2045.

According to a senior ministry official, **it will take "more than 10 years to secure all the land needed."** **The ministry is set to begin the construction work with plots it has acquired, rather than waiting until all the necessary plots are purchased.**

Japan calling for WTO to remove Korea's import ban

August 20, 2015

Japan to call for WTO panel ruling on Seoul's nuclear disaster-related fishery import ban

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/08/20/business/japan-call-wto-panel-ruling-seouls-nuclear-disaster-related-fishery-import-ban/#.VdWBP5fwlLM>

Kyodo

Japan plans to ask the World Trade Organization to set up a panel to rule on Tokyo's complaint over South Korea's import ban on Japanese fishery products following the 2011 Fukushima nuclear meltdowns, sources said Wednesday.

The move, to be made Thursday at the earliest, to seek establishment of the dispute settlement panel comes as Tokyo and Seoul remain apart over the issue in bilateral consultations that have taken place under WTO procedures.

It will be the first time for Japan to take such action against other countries over import restrictions imposed since the start of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant disaster, which resulted in massive radiation leakage to the environment.

Since the nuclear crisis began in March 2011, South Korea banned imports of 50 kinds of marine products from Fukushima and seven other nearby prefectures. In September 2013, Seoul expanded the restrictions to bar all fishery products from the eight prefectures.

Last May, Japan notified South Korea that it wants to start bilateral consultations over the issue. But the two sides have remained at odds and Tokyo has decided to ask that the trade dispute panel be set up.

Japan is calling for the removal of Seoul's trade restrictive measures, saying they have no scientific justification, while South Korea is arguing they are legitimate steps to ensure food safety for its people.

Once the dispute settlement panel is established, possibly in September, it is unlikely to take more than a year for a ruling to be issued and finalized.

August 18, 2015

Less than 10% applied for temporary stay

September 1, 2015

Fukushima evacuees prepare for eventual return, but most are choosing not to

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201509010062>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Evacuees from three Fukushima Prefecture localities who were displaced by the nuclear disaster started temporarily returning to their homes on Aug. 31 to prepare for their eventual permanent return. But applicants for the temporary stay program that began that day totaled 1,265, less than 10 percent of about 14,000 eligible as of Aug. 30.

The small number indicates that an overwhelming majority of evacuees are still concerned about radiation levels and prospects for a return to normalcy in their hometowns.

Fukushima Governor Masao Uchibori said a secure environment must be in place for evacuees to participate in the preparatory program.

“What is most important is to provide a sense of safety and security,” he said at a news conference on Aug. 31. “Evacuees will not readily join the program unless they have easy access to health care, education and shopping areas.”

Residents of parts of Minami-Soma, Kawamata and Katsurao were ordered by the central government to evacuate when a triple meltdown occurred at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant as a result of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

Last month, the government approved the program that would let evacuees from the three areas temporarily return to their homes for up to three months. The program is a step toward lifting the evacuation order and encouraging people to return home, as many have chosen to settle elsewhere after the prolonged evacuation.

In the village of Katsurao on Aug. 31, evacuee Kazuhiro Matsumoto, 59, was busy repairing the damaged walls of his home.

“It is nice to be back home, but I will miss my grandchildren after my return here,” Matsumoto said. “I am fixing my home because we need a place where my family and relatives can get together on New Year’s Day.”

While living in makeshift housing, Matsumoto has been working in cleanup operations in Katsurao for which his company was commissioned.

His son’s family of six already built a home outside the village and decided not to return to Katsurao to live.

Rice paddies across from Matsumoto’s home are overrun with weeds, with a large number of bags containing radioactive soil and other waste produced in decontamination operations piling up.

“Even though the authorities say we are safe, I am still anxious because **we cannot see radiation**,” he said.

The government plans to lift the evacuation order by spring 2017 for many parts of the evacuation area, which encompasses a 20-kilometer radius around the Fukushima plant and localities outside the zone that had high levels of radiation.

Officials from Minami-Soma, Kawamata and Katsurao hope to see the evacuation order lifted by next spring.

They have begun a preparatory program based on prospects that cleanup work will progress further in the coming months.

Local authorities say many general contractors will not accept assignments in the evacuation area. But they believe that work to mend local infrastructure and homes will proceed once evacuees are allowed to return home to live.

The number of residents who signed up for the preparatory program was low because **many of the evacuees, primarily young couples, have decided to make a fresh start. They have purchased homes close to their workplaces or their children's schools.**

Four years after the onset of the nuclear disaster, about 79,000 people from 10 localities remain evacuated.

(This article was written by Naoyuki Takahashi, Takuro Negishi and Satoru Semba.)

Evacuees allowed to return for 3 months



Tadaaki Sato and his wife Nobuko, middle, chat with neighbors while decontamination work is being carried out in front of them in Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, on Aug. 31, 2015. (Mainichi)
September 12, 2015

Fukushima evacuees return home for three-month trial stays

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150901p2a00m0na005000c.html>

Residents of three municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture returned home on Aug. 31 for three-month trial stays to prepare for the government's planned lifting of nuclear evacuation orders issued in the wake of meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

The three-month stays have been allowed in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Minamisoma, the town of Kawamata and the village of Katsurao. There are three levels of no-entry areas, with "difficult-to-return zones" being the area with the highest radiation dosages. According to the Cabinet Office, 14,255 people in a total of 4,647 households from the no-entry areas of the lower two levels are allowed to return home for three months. However, the number of people who applied for the trial stays remained low at 1,265 from 465 households.

Minamisoma resident Tadaaki Sato, 75, who had evacuated to the city's Kashima district, came home to the Odaka district with his 74-year-old wife, Nobuko, and his mother, Toshi, 97.

"I feel like I can finally be positive about life," Sato said, with a sigh of relief.

The couple was busy cleaning their house and setting up furniture and household goods that they had brought in the day before. Sato saw an acquaintance who had also returned home in his front yard and chatted to catch up.

The Sato family moved from one location to another -- in Yamagata, Nagano and other prefectures -- following the Fukushima nuclear disaster in March 2011. In April this year, Toshi had her right leg broken and was left wheelchair-bound. To fulfill his mother's wish to go home, Sato spent some 1.5 million yen to install an electric lift to stairs at their house.

Decontamination work on Sato's premises had just finished on the morning of Aug. 31 while such work was still being carried out in neighboring areas.

"It's still chaotic, but I can relax in my own home," Nobuko said with a smile.

Of 133 households in the area where Sato's home is located, only 18 households had applied for the trial stays. Sato said he was worried about the future of his hometown and whether it will revive to its pre-disaster state.

The three municipalities plan to officially allow their residents to permanently return home, except for those from the difficult-to-return zones, in spring next year.

Evacuees begin three-month stays in homes in three Fukushima municipalities ahead of final return

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/09/01/national/science-health/evacuees-begin-three-month-stays-homes-three-fukushima-municipalities-ahead-final-return/#.VeVLv5fwmic>

JJI

FUKUSHIMA – Evacuees from three municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture returned home on Monday for long-term stays before the central government's planned lifting of its evacuation order there.

The government has found it all right to allow the three-month stays to prepare for permanent returns home since radiation levels have dropped in the municipalities — the city of Minamisoma, the town of Kawamata and the village of Katsurao — since the March 2011 meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 plant.

The government will decide by November whether to lift the evacuation order after hearing from the evacuees.

The long-term stays were allowed to 14,255 people in 4,647 households who had been residents of evacuation areas in the municipalities, except no-go zones, where returns are difficult, the largest number in the long-stay program so far.

As of Monday, 1,308 people out of 478 households, some 10 percent of the total, had reported to the government that they would start the long-term stays in their homes.

Decontamination work in the residential areas of Kawamata and Katsurao was completed in the summer last year, halving the average radiation level in the air to 0.5 microsievert per hour.

In Minamisoma, only 26 percent of decontamination work had been finished by the end of July, but natural falls in radiation levels were taken into consideration.

Dosimeters will be handed out to each of the households staying in their homes, while consultants will be dispatched to check the health status of residents. Minamisoma has set April 2016 as its target date for the lifting of the evacuation order, while Katsurao and Kawamata have both named spring of the same year.

Long-term stays in their homes for Fukushima evacuees were conducted in the city of Tamura and part of the village of Kawauchi, where evacuation orders have been removed, and in the town of Naraha, where it is slated to be lifted on Sept.5.

Nahara

September 4, 2015

Lanterns lit up in Fukushima town ahead of lifting of evacuation order



Participants in "Candle Night" look at paper lanterns they lit up at a sports park in Naraha, Fukushima Prefecture, on Sept. 4, 2015, the day before an evacuation order issued for the whole town was lifted. (Mainichi)

NARAHARA, Fukushima -- Local residents lit up 3,000 lanterns here on the night of Sept. 4 -- the day before an evacuation order for the town affected by the Fukushima nuclear crisis was lifted -- to mourn victims of the March 2011 killer quake and tsunami.

In the event called "Candle Night," local residents and volunteers expressed their hopes for recovery from the disaster on paper lanterns placed in a sports park in Naraha.

"There is no endless tunnel, no ceaseless rain," read one message by Fusao Sakamoto, 68. Sakamoto has been preparing to resume his gardening business while traveling back and forth between his home in Naraha and a temporary housing unit in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Iwaki, where he currently lives. "I firmly believe that we'll find our way back to normal life and be able to smile," he says.

The government lifted an evacuation order it had issued for the whole town of Naraha on Sept. 5.

Machu Picchu & Fukushima

September 4, 2015

Machu Picchu, Fukushima village forming friendship agreement

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201509040036

By NATSUKI EDOGAWA/ Staff Writer

OTAMA, Fukushima Prefecture--After rejecting offers from around the world, a famed Peruvian village home to Inca remains picked a small municipality in Fukushima Prefecture for its first sister-city relationship.

In fact, it was Machu Picchu, a "lost city" in the Andes Mountains, that approached Otama village for the friendship agreement.

Machu Picchu had received many requests for such ties, but it could not find any significant connection or relation to those suitors, Elard Escala, the Peruvian ambassador to Japan, said at a news conference in Otama on Sept. 3.

"We wanted to have a friendship agreement first with the home village of Yokichi Nouchi, the man to whom the (Peruvian) villagers were greatly indebted," Escala said.

Nouchi, who was from Otama, a village at the foot of Mount Adatara, immigrated to Peru in 1917. As an employee at the national railway, he helped to lay the tracks leading to Machu Picchu, and he moved to the village in the 1920s.

He built the hydraulic power plant and a hotel in the remote village, and served as chief of Machu Picchu for two years. He died in 1969.

With a population of about 3,000, Machu Picchu lies at the foot of a location listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site that is considered one of the world's greatest tourist destinations.

Nouchi's legacy prompted Machu Picchu to propose a friendship agreement with Otama, a village of about 8,500, according to officials. But the plan was delayed partly because Otama lacked the funds to send officials to the Peruvian village.

Cesar Yoshiro Nouchi, the 39-year-old grandson of Yokichi Nouchi and a resident of Nagoya, helped to pave the way for the first visit by Otama officials to Machu Picchu in 2012.

The sister-city affiliation ceremony will be held in October in Machu Picchu.

Difficult to go back without hospitals

September 4, 2015

Lack of hospitals near Fukushima plant an obstacle to returnees

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150904p2a00m0na016000c.html>

The town of Naraha near the disaster-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant is set to have its evacuation order lifted on Sept. 5, but as with other municipalities in the Futaba district, a lack of hospital access may stand in the way of residents returning.

Before the nuclear disaster, the population of the Futaba district -- which consists of Naraha and four other municipalities under complete evacuation order, as well as the partially evacuated Kawauchi, and Hirono -- was around 72,800. Currently the population is less than 10 percent of that. Before the disaster, there were a total of 54 hospitals and clinics in the Futaba district, including three hospitals capable of accepting emergency patients with serious injuries or diseases, referred to as "secondary emergency hospitals." Currently there are only a total of five hospitals and clinics, and none are capable of handling serious cases.

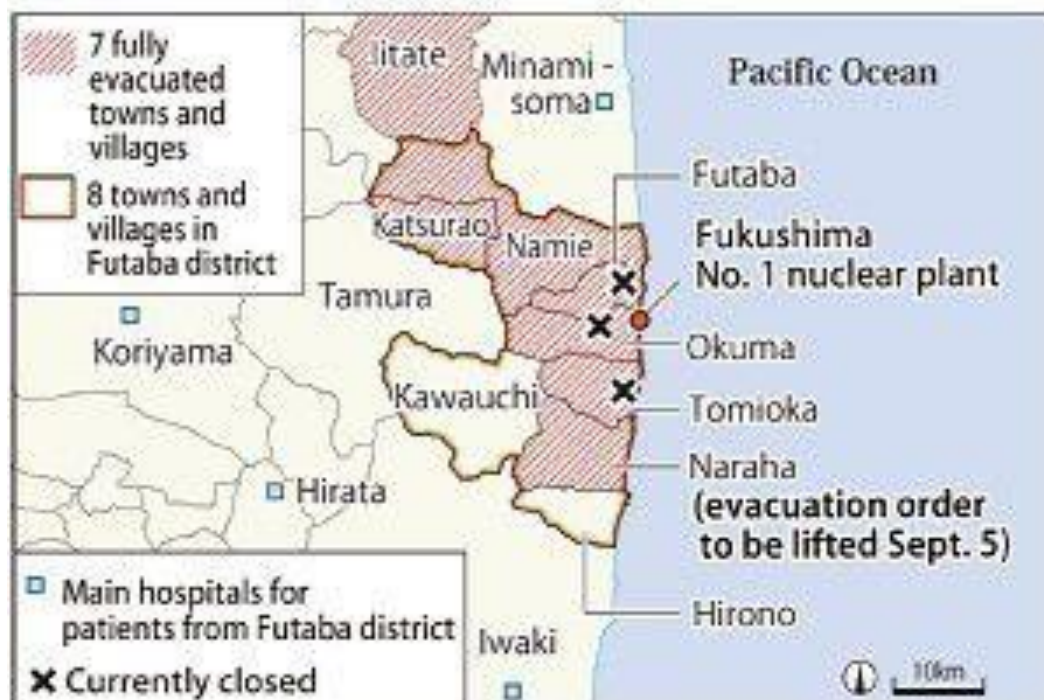
According to the Futaba Fire Department, in 2010 there were 2,454 people sent to local hospitals from the Futaba district, but only 396 people sent in 2014. However, the number of residents and decontamination workers is increasing, and the department expects the number of people sent to local hospitals in 2015 to exceed 500.

In 2010, 63 percent of emergency patients were sent to facilities within the Futaba district, but in 2014, such cases only represented 23 percent, with the rest being sent to other places like the cities of Iwaki and Koriyama.

The average time from an ambulance call to the ambulance arriving at a hospital with the patient was 36.8 minutes in 2010, and in 2014 it was 55.8 minutes. This time was 12.2 minutes longer than the preliminary 2014 prefectural average of 43.6 minutes, and it was 16.5 minutes longer than the 2013 national average of 39.3 minutes.

Hitoshi Onita, vice-chief of the Futaba Fire Department, said, "This could cost lives in emergency medical cases, where every minute and every second count," adding, "It is a source of concern that there are no well-equipped hospitals nearby." The department plans to gradually boost paramedic figures, increasing the number of ambulances with a paramedic onboard from one to two, to help alleviate the situation.

Secondary emergency hospitals near Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant



According to the Fukushima Prefectural Government and other sources, a new prefectural clinic with a fulltime doctor is due to open in Naraha in February next year, and clinics are expected to gradually increase in number as people return to the area.

However, a representative for the prefecture's regional health department says, "As long as we can't predict where residents will return and their number, it is difficult to decide when and where to set up hospitals."

A meeting to discuss the matter between the national and prefectural governments and the municipal governments of the Futaba district will be held for the first time on Sept. 7.

One 75-year-old housewife who evacuated from Naraha to Iwaki says that she does not plan to return to her house in Naraha for the time being. In winter of 2010 she became dizzy and fell while shopping and was transported to a now-closed prefectural hospital in the town of Okuma. She says that she nearly had a clogged blood vessel in her brain.

"If there isn't a trustworthy hospital nearby for an emergency situation, it will be difficult to go back," she says.

Return to Nahara

September 5, 2015

Fukushima town facing population decline, lack of lifelines as evacuation orders lifted

Residents began returning to the Fukushima Prefecture town of Naraha on Sept. 5 as evacuation orders issued after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster were lifted, but the town's revival is uncertain as residents fret over the scarcity of medical services and other lifelines.

To make Naraha residents' return to their homes successful and to increase momentum for the reconstruction of additional towns, the national government is drawing up policies to provide assistance to local businesses.

In the district of Kamikobana, an area near central Naraha that is surrounded by forest, Noriko Sato, 53, smiled on Sept. 4 as she watched her 93-year-old mother-in-law tend to flowers in the garden of the family's home, to which they returned after having evacuated to the Fukushima prefectural city of Iwaki. "She is really happy to be back," Sato said.

The women had participated in a program that began in April to allow temporary overnight stays, launched in preparation for the full lifting of the evacuation orders in Naraha.

Among the 18 households in the district, however, some 30 percent have built new homes in the areas where they evacuated -- and though the evacuation orders have been lifted, hardly any of them plan to return anytime soon.

Sato says that she had also planned to resettle permanently outside of Naraha, but that she decided to return due to her mother-in-law's desire to live in her hometown, which had been her residence for 70 years. Meanwhile, Sato's 56-year-old husband has been living on his own in Niigata Prefecture, after the foodstuffs company where he works relocated there following the nuclear crisis. With their 28-year-old daughter living and working alone in the city of Iwaki, the family of four continues to live scattered apart. In the meantime, Naraha residents are voicing their anxiety about life in the town following the lifting of the evacuation orders. For example, a high concentration of radioactive materials remains sunk at the bottom of a dammed lake within the town's borders that serves as a local water source.

"It is only the elderly who wish to return here," Sato noted. "In the future, the population will continue to decrease even further," she added. "And if people don't return here, places to shop and to seek medical treatment won't be built. I really don't know whether this town will make it or not."

Farmer Tamio Watanabe, 68, spent time cleaning his home on Sept. 4 in preparation for moving back in together with his family, whose members span three generations. "This town is going to experience financial hardship at some point after the government has finished with its period of intensive reconstruction," he commented worriedly. "The governmental services available here are likely going to decline as well."

Prior to the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co., the town did not receive local government tax allocations because it was receiving subsidies for hosting the Fukushima No. 2 Nuclear Power Plant. Now, the town is receiving tax allocations because its tax revenues have fallen to less than one-third of pre-disaster levels. Anticipated population declines also mean that predictions for the future there remain uncertain.

Sachio and Hiroko Watanabe, aged 56 and 61, respectively, say that with more than four years having passed since the disaster, life as evacuees has become the new norm.

The couple tore down their home in Naraha this year in February, and bought a 38-year-old home in the city of Iwaki, where Sachio's company had relocated. "We will be watching what happens in Naraha from afar," Sachio commented softly, an air of sadness about him.

According to prefectural estimates, populations of the 12 municipalities where evacuation orders were issued following the nuclear accident have decreased due to factors such as people relocating their residence registries to the areas where they evacuated.

As a consequence, eight towns and villages in the Fukushima prefectural county of Futaba are considering merging in the future.

Evacuation orders for six whole towns and villages in Futaba County are still in place. Among them, large areas in the three towns of Namie, Futaba and Okuma are designated as "difficult-to-return zones" where annual cumulative radiation exposure levels exceed 50 millisieverts.

The mayor of one of the municipalities in Futaba County commented, "Everyone here realizes that at some point, we will need to begin looking at the possibility of merging." Meanwhile, a top prefectural official noted, "While we do not have the capacity to undertake such a merger at present, this will eventually be a discussion that we can no longer avoid."

As evacuation orders were lifted in Naraha, the city of Minamisoma and the town of Kawamata, along with the village of Katsurao, began a program of provisional overnight stays on Aug. 31.

In Minamisoma, however, only 32 percent of residential neighborhoods and other areas where residents visit throughout the course of their daily activities had been decontaminated as of Aug. 7 although the municipal government is aiming to have evacuation orders for the city lifted by April next year.

"Decontamination is ongoing, and there is almost no one around," commented Toshiyuki Kuroki, 66, a former agricultural cooperative employee who returned with his wife to their home in Minamisoma's Odaka district.

"We are not yet receiving postal mail delivery, and life here is inconvenient, he added. "But at the place the authorities had rented (as a temporary housing unit for us), we could not work in the garden -- and in fact, there was nothing to do at all. Here, at least things are better than they were there."

Return to Nahara (2)

September 5, 2015

Gov't lifts evacuation order for Fukushima town after nuclear crisis

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150905p2g00m0dm001000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA (5, Kyodo) -- The government on Saturday lifted its evacuation order for a town in Fukushima Prefecture issued after the 2011 nuclear disaster, although it is uncertain whether residents will actually return to their homes.

Effective midnight Friday, the government lifted the evacuation order for Naraha.

Similar decisions were made for two smaller areas in Fukushima Prefecture last year, but this is the first time to lift an order for a municipality whose entire population was ordered to evacuate.

Most of Naraha lies within a 20-kilometer radius of the radiation-leaking Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, where three reactors experienced meltdowns after a huge earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

The government plans to lift its evacuation order for areas with relatively low amounts of radiation by the end of March 2017.

Some 7,400 citizens of Naraha, where the estimated annual radiation exposure is 20 millisieverts or lower, remain evacuated, with nearly 80 percent staying in Iwaki, about 30 kilometers south of the town. Since April, they have been allowed to stay for days in Naraha. As of Monday, however, only some 10 percent had applied for such stays.

With the lifting of evacuation order for Naraha, such orders are still in place for nine municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture.

Evacuation order lifted in Fukushima's Naraha Town

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Sep. 5, 2015 - Updated 02:15 UTC+2

Japan's government has lifted an evacuation order for Naraha Town, near the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The measure took effect on Friday at midnight. Nearly all of the area is located 20 kilometers from the plant in Fukushima Prefecture and was subject to the March 2011 evacuation order.

The government says decontamination has been completed in the area. Officials say the town's environment is almost ready for residents to return to their homes.

This is the third evacuation order to be lifted since the accident. The previous 2 were the Miyakoji district in Tamura City and the eastern part of Kawauchi Village.

But Naraha is the first municipality among the 7 towns and villages around the plant to have its evacuation order lifted.

These 7 municipalities totally emptied of residents, as well as local government workers. The evacuation was ordered by the central government soon after the disaster.

The lifting of the evacuation order allows the town's approximately 7,300 residents to return to their homes. It also permits them to resume commercial and business activities.

At the same time, the town faces the challenge of addressing residents' concerns about radiation and building a safe environment for its residents. It also faces the task of resuming the town's commercial and medical services for the first time in 4-and-a-half years.

An evacuation order remains in place for about 70,000 people in 9 municipalities surrounding the Daiichi plant.

The central government plans to lift the order for the remaining municipalities once decontamination is complete and services are capable of supporting people's lives.

September 5, 2015

Evacuation order lifted completely for town of Naraha near wrecked Fukushima plant

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/09/05/national/japan-to-lift-evacuation-order-for-fukushima-town-of-naraha/#.VerlFJfwmic>

JJI

FUKUSHIMA – The town of Naraha in Fukushima Prefecture celebrated Saturday, following the midnight lifting of the government’s evacuation order 4½ years after the eruption of the March 2011 nuclear disaster.

Naraha became the first of seven radiation-tainted municipalities in the prefecture to be entirely cleared for repopulation since the triple-reactor meltdown following the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

“The clock that was stopped has now begun to tick,” Naraha Mayor Yukiei Matsumoto said at a ceremony held to promote the early return of local residents as well as the reconstruction of their hometown.

About 100 people took part in the event, including central government officials.

Most of the town is within the 20-km no-go zone set up around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, which spewed radiation into the air and sea after the earthquake-triggered tsunami knocked its power out, prompting the meltdowns.

Naraha is “at the starting line at last,” Matsumoto told reporters early Saturday, adding that he would continue working toward reconstruction.

Naraha had a registered population of 7,368 residing in 2,694 households as of Tuesday. According to a survey by the government and others, some 46 percent of the residents hope to return.

But only a portion is expected to return immediately, including 780 in some 350 households who were cleared for long-term stays.

The central and town governments will reopen a medical clinic in the town in October, while a new prefectural clinic is slated to be built as early as February.

To handle sudden illnesses among the elderly, medical services will be boosted, such as by distributing emergency buzzers to people who need them.

To meet requests for shopping services, a supermarket in the town launched free delivery in July. A publicly built, privately run shopping center with a supermarket and do-it-yourself store is due in fiscal 2016.

To address lingering radiation concerns, dosimeters will be handed out and 24-hour monitoring will be conducted at a water filtration plant. Also, tap water will be tested at households worried about radioactive contamination.

Return to Nahara (3)

September 5, 2015

Evacuation order lifted in Naraha, but few returning home

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201509050035>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

NARAHARA, Fukushima Prefecture--Authorities lifted an evacuation order for 7,400 residents of this small town close to the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant on Sept. 5, but very few homeowners have indicated they plan to return anytime soon.

Most of Naraha is located within the 20-kilometer-radius evacuation zone surrounding the stricken plant. Even though the evacuation order was lifted at midnight for the entire town, there are lingering fears of radiation contamination and concerns over a lack of essentials that would allow residents to pick up the threads of their former lives.

Of the seven Fukushima municipalities where all residents were ordered to evacuate after the triple meltdown triggered by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster, Naraha is the first one to have the evacuation order removed.

One evacuee who did return to his Naraha home was 68-year-old Fusao Sakamoto.

"Looking back, I feel my four-and-half-years as an evacuee was agonizingly long," the landscape gardener said.

According to the town government, only 780 residents of 351 households, or just over 10 percent of the entire population, were registered at the end of August with the town's program to allow them to stay overnight to prepare for permanent resettlement.

It was the third removal of an evacuation order among areas in the former no-go zone set within 20 km of the plant operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co.

The number of residents allowed to return home is the largest with the lifting of the Naraha evacuation order. It is expected to set a precedent for large-scale resettlement of Fukushima evacuees.

Almost all Naraha residents fled from their hometown on March 12, the day after the nuclear disaster unfolded. The Fukushima plant is located in the nearby towns of Okuma and Futaba.

Naraha was initially designated as a no-entry zone, which in principle prohibited residents from entering the town. But it was redesignated as a zone being prepared for the lifting of the evacuation order in August 2012, which meant that residents were allowed to enter the town during daytime hours.

With decontamination work and restoration of basic infrastructure largely completed, evacuees were allowed to return home for long-term stays in April to prepare for permanent resettlement.

On Sept. 5, the town government, which relocated its functions to Iwaki and other municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture, began to resume operations at the town office building in central Naraha.

"The clock has just started ticking again for our town with the lifting of the evacuation order after many months," Mayor Yukiei Matsumoto told town officials. "We will accelerate efforts to achieve full recovery of the town."

Return to Nahara (5)

September 5, 2015

Town near Fukushima plant renews hope for rebuild

Sep. 5, 2015 - Updated 15:10 UTC+2



<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

An event has been held in a town near the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant to celebrate the lifting of an evacuation order for the first time in more than 4 years.

About 200 people attended the ceremony in the town of Naraha on Saturday to pray for the town's rebirth.

Mayor Yukiei Matsumoto said he hopes to work with residents to create a new community. He said he will make all-out efforts to revive Naraha.

Yosuke Takagi, the head of the local task-force on the nuclear disaster, pledged that the government will provide full support for rebuilding the town.

Town officials unveiled an image of a planned "compact community," where medical facilities, shops and housing are concentrated into a small area to boost convenience.

The mayor and a group of children then planted a tree as a symbol of the town's recovery and children's health.

Three elementary and junior high school students read out essays they had written about their town and how happy they were to return.

A 65-year-old man said being back in Naraha was the happiest he has been in the past 4 years.

The central government ordered 7 municipalities near the Fukushima Daiichi plant to be completely evacuated soon after the March, 2011 disaster. Naraha is the first of the municipalities to have had the evacuation order lifted.

Return to Nahara (6)

September 6, 2015

Long-time residents of Naraha facing dilemma with lifting of evacuation order

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201509060018>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

With the lifting of the evacuation order for the Fukushima Prefecture town of Naraha on Sept. 5, Shukan Sakanushi, head priest of the Dairakuin temple in Naraha, decided to return home.

At midnight, he chanted Buddhist sutras in a ceremony praying for the rebuilding of the town.

"Those who live in temples have to go to where the people are," Sakanushi, 44, said. "Today is a milestone of sorts. I will return to the temple from today."

However, because only a small number of long-time residents have returned to Naraha, **many parts of the town are quiet and lonely at night. Community bonds remain severed**, making a return to Naraha difficult for former residents such as Teruyuki Ishizawa, 75, who now lives in temporary housing in Iwaki.

"I want to return but cannot," he said. "The town is so dark that I cannot allow my wife to walk outside by herself."

The lifting of the evacuation order for residents who fled in the wake of the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami does not mean that all 7,400 residents can simply return home.

Some evacuees have established comfortable lives elsewhere and want to continue with that daily routine. Others are discouraged by the likelihood that only a few neighbors will return to their communities even with the evacuation order lifted.

For Sakanushi, March 11, 2011, was a special day, but not because of the twin disasters that changed his life. That was the day he was officially appointed head priest of Dairakuin by the headquarters of the Buzan sect of Shingon Buddhism to which the temple belongs.

He intended to take over most of the duties performed by his father, Myokan, 78, who had served as head priest of Dairakuin for 50 years.

However, after the evacuation order was issued for Naraha, Sakanushi's family of six moved away.

Sakanushi is also an employee of the Naraha town government. He temporarily moved to Aizu-Wakamatsu where he provided support to other evacuees. Subsequently, he moved to Kita-Ibaraki, Ibaraki Prefecture, where his wife, Chisaki, 39, daughter, Mayu, 11, and son, Homare, 7, had evacuated to. Sakanushi's parents eventually settled in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, after initially evacuating to Gunma Prefecture.

Although the evacuation order has been lifted, Sakanushi is now the only family member to return to Naraha.

No decision has yet been made about whether to have his two children return. The town government plans to resume the elementary and junior high schools in town from spring 2017. But Homare has no memories of life in Naraha, because he evacuated four and a half years ago.

"I do hold the feeling of wanting to live together as a family," Sakanushi said. "However, the children have become accustomed to life in Ibaraki. I will think about whether we should all return by the time school resumes here."

Many of his temple's followers have also not returned to Naraha. Some are still concerned about the radiation, while others are worried about the inconveniences associated with returning to a community that has been deserted for more than four years.

Sakanushi plans to maintain the temple "annex" that was established in Iwaki, where about 80 percent of Naraha residents have evacuated to.

The tsunami and Fukushima nuclear accident have drastically altered the appearance of Naraha.

Homes along the coast remain flattened from the tsunami. Areas that once were rice paddies now are filled with black plastic bags holding dirt contaminated by radiation.

After the nuclear accident, lodging facilities and offices of companies involved in reactor decommissioning and decontamination work related to the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant have been constructed in Naraha. More than 1,000 workers now reside in Naraha, exceeding the number of long-time residents who returned. Those workers also frequent the temporary shopping arcade that has been set up in town.

A couple who now reside in Nagoya have all but given up hope of ever returning to Naraha.

Yoshiharu and Nobuko Matsumoto fled to Nagoya because their oldest daughter lives in Aichi Prefecture.

At first, Nobuko, 79, would say to Yoshiharu, 80, "We will return after a year or so."

However, their lives as evacuees have now lasted for four and a half years.

Their oldest daughter, who returned temporarily to Naraha to sell off furniture and clean up, told them how their home has deteriorated.

Mold has grown on the house, which has also been damaged by rats. Shrubs have grown taller than the height of the Matsumotos.

This spring, the Matsumotos were told it would cost 10 million yen (\$84,000) to repair the home.

That was when Nobuko decided, "I will remain in Nagoya."

Yoshiharu was still determined to return to Naraha.

In early August, the entire family returned to Naraha with the intention of completing the clean-up work.

Even though he had back problems, Yoshiharu made the trip to Naraha, but he could not stop the tears from flowing when he saw his home for the first time in more than four years.

A next-door neighbor had begun destroying their home. The neighbor across the street had also decided to do the same. Of the family of five who used to live in the back of the Matsumoto home, only the grandmother in her 80s is planning to return.

In total, only one neighbor among their acquaintances was planning to return to Naraha.

"I want to return, but if I cannot farm and there are no friends, I would not be able to go on living there,"

Yoshiharu said. "When I saw our home, I felt we had moved far away."

He still has not decided whether to tear down the home because he fears that would anger his ancestors.

Yoshiharu has asked his children to, at the very least, leave the family grave in Naraha.

(This article was written by Akifumi Nagahashi and Fumihiko Yamada.)

Every leak of radioactive water makes it worse

September 7, 2015

EDITORIAL: Each Fukushima water leak weakens faith in Japan's food safety

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201509070016>

Japan's dispute with South Korea over its import restrictions on Japanese seafood imposed after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster is now going to the World Trade Organization.

Following the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, South Korea banned imports of some marine products caught in waters off Fukushima and seven other prefectures, mainly areas along the Pacific coast between Aomori and Chiba prefectures. Then in autumn 2013, Seoul expanded the scope of the ban to include all marine products from these prefectures.

The Japanese government responded to the move by criticizing the measure for “lacking a scientific basis.” Tokyo has been demanding that the measure be withdrawn while cooperating with Seoul’s investigations. But the two countries have failed to resolve their disagreements, and Japan has asked the WTO to set up a dispute-settlement panel comprising experts from third countries to rule over South Korea’s import ban. More than a dozen countries and areas have barred imports of all or part of Japanese-made foods, but the government has singled out South Korea because the country has expanded its restrictions. The WTO tends to be regarded as dysfunctional because of the lack of progress in the global trade-liberalizing talks under its auspices. But the world trade watchdog has at least been performing its dispute-settling functions.

Japan has been making active use of the WTO’s ability to settle trade disputes.

Over the past several years, Tokyo has filed complaints with the WTO over China’s restrictions on exports of rare earth minerals and Ukraine’s emergency restrictions on automobile imports, for instance. These actions have produced certain positive results for Japan.

Japan’s diplomatic relations with South Korea remain strained over some long-standing territorial and history-related rows. But both countries should not allow these problems to affect the ways they deal with economic issues like trade disputes.

Tokyo and Seoul need to continue talks to seek an early solution to the dispute even while the WTO’s panel is hearing the case.

Four-and-a-half years after the accident, coastal areas of Fukushima Prefecture, where the disaster-stricken nuclear power plant is located, are still subject to restrictions on shipments of certain kinds of fish. Even for the fishes not covered, fishermen in these areas are allowed to catch and sell them only on a “trial basis.”

A system has been established to ensure that farm, forestry and fishery products made in areas directly affected by the disaster as well as surrounding regions are shipped only after they have passed the safety standards in radiation tests. But consumers have shown a tendency to avoid all food products from these areas.

In cases of fishery products, only small-scale fishing operations and limited sales of products have been conducted to gauge the reactions from consumers.

The South Korean government says it has expanded the import curbs in response to leaks of radiation-contaminated water from the Fukushima plant.

With the South Korean public deeply worried about food contaminated with radioactive materials, the step was aimed at preventing confusion among consumers in the country, according to Seoul.

The scope of the import restrictions and the means involved may be open to dispute. It should be noted, however, that **in both South Korea and Japan, food safety from a scientific viewpoint doesn’t necessarily reassure consumers.**

The Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant has been plagued by leaks of polluted water. Local fishermen have lodged protests every time such an incident occurs.

It must not be forgotten that every leak of contaminated water makes consumers even more unwilling to put their faith in the safety of products from the areas.

The only way to restore the public's trust in the safety of food is to ensure there will be no more leaks of contaminated water nor any exacerbation of the nuclear accident. The food trade dispute with South Korea should serve as a reminder of the absolute need to achieve these most basic nuclear safety goals.
--The Asahi Shimbun, Sept. 6

When evacuees refuse to leave temporary housing

September 10, 2015

3/11 evacuees' refusal to vacate temporary housing causes reconstruction headache

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/09/10/national/social-issues/311-evacuees-refuseal-vacate-temporary-housing-causes-reconstruction-headache/#.VfEnJ5fwmic>

Kyodo

SENDAI – At least 900 temporary housing units in 20 municipalities in the disaster-hit prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima have not been vacated or demolished even though residents no longer have a dire need to stay in them, according to a survey.

If those dwellings are not razed, local governments cannot use the land to reconstruct their communities. But some residents have financial, emotional and other reasons preventing them from moving out, causing a headache for municipal officials.

The survey, released Wednesday, was of 46 municipalities that still provided rent-free temporary housing as of the end of July.

In Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, which suffered the greatest tsunami damage on March 11, 2011, 451 temporary housing units need to be vacated, while the town of Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, where evacuees from the Fukushima nuclear calamity stay, had about 160 such occupied units.

"I know it's not good," a man in his 20s said of the fact that he still lives in temporary housing despite having built a new home outside Ishinomaki.

He didn't want to move out because he feared disaster would strike again, leaving him without a home.

"There are still many temporary housing units around and I don't intend to move out anytime soon," the man said. Ishinomaki still has about 7,200 such dwellings, the largest within the three disaster-hit prefectures.

In Sendai, where many permanent dwellings have been built, there were still 52 temporary units that need to be vacated, according to the survey.

A few families still live in temporary housing in Sendai despite the completion of a new public housing complex.

When a Sendai official called on them to ask why they hadn't moved into the new complex, they said they were scared because the new housing had been built at a site that had been flooded by the tsunami.

The official didn't pressure them further.

"But at some point, they need to move into permanent housing," the official said.

The holdouts include elderly people living alone.

In one case in Shiogama, Miyagi Prefecture, although the resident had moved to a nursing facility, there were no relatives who could help move the person's belongings out of the temporary unit. In another case,

an elderly resident died in a temporary unit and no one came forward to claim or dispose of the occupant's belongings.

Financial constraints are also discouraging residents from moving out of temporary units.

An unemployed resident in Kuji, Iwate Prefecture, has been reluctant to move out of the rent-free housing because the new public housing charges rent. Kuji officials have been unable to persuade the resident to apply for social welfare.

There were other cases in which temporary housing units were not vacated because they were being used for unauthorized purposes, including for storage or as hotel-like accommodations.

"There was a case in which the resident built a home outside the town but used the temporary housing to go to work in Onagawa," said an official of Onagawa, Miyagi Prefecture.

"Technically, they need to move out," said one official. "But some cases are complicated and we have a hard time resolving them."

Although municipalities have built new, permanent public housing complexes and have urged dwellers in temporary units to relocate to them, there are other hurdles in the way of razing or consolidating the remaining temporary units, including getting residents to relocate away from their current neighbors.

As of the end of July, there were still about 52,000 temporary evacuee housing units in Iwate, Fukushima and Miyagi with an average vacancy rate of about 30 percent, and maintaining these communities and ensuring they remain secure are proving difficult.

Among the three prefectures, 10 municipalities have drawn up plans to reduce and consolidate the temporary housing units and seven are working out plans.

Kamaishi, Iwate Prefecture, has managed since spring to get more than 50 households to move to another temporary housing site, taking the time to explain the situation to each resident.

Officials at Kesennuma, Miyagi Prefecture, held meetings in July and August to explain to temporary housing residents that some had to move to more consolidated units.

The city plans to reduce the temporary housing complexes from 92 to 23 by the end of 2017.

But the city has been forced to revise the plan because of delayed reconstruction work, which has irked residents of the temporary housing units who had hoped to move into better dwellings sooner rather than later.

Kyoji Nagaya, 62, had planned to build a new home on high ground, but construction won't start for another six months or more. What he believed would be "temporary" housing turned out to be his residence for more than 4½ years.

"I don't know how many times I've been disappointed," said Nagaya. "I just have to wait."

Free?

September 7, 2015

Finally Free to go Home

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclearwatch/20150907.html>

Mitsuko Nishikawa

Some people who fled their residences in Fukushima prefecture more than 4 years ago are finally going home for good. The Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant accident forced thousands from their homes. Towns and villages near the plant were declared no-entry zones. Now for the first time, all the people in one town have been given the green light to return home permanently.

Children's voices are back. They gathered last Saturday to commemorate the rebirth of the town.

"When I first heard the news that we can go back to Naraha, I felt I wanted to know more about this place where I was born," resident Daisuke Masai said.

Naraha town is located within 20 kilometers of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. The Japanese government issued an evacuation order for most parts of the town to protect citizens from high radiation. Residents and local government departments had to leave town.

The national government began a decontamination program later in 2011.

Four years and six months have passed since the accident. The government lifted the evacuation order at midnight Friday. More than 7,300 former residents are now free to live and operate businesses here.

In the morning, people were on the streets to greet their neighbors just like they used to do 4 years ago.

One resident was there to clean the house she had longed to come back to.

"My grandchildren and great grandchildren are coming this month," Sadako Nagayama said. "I'll make the room spick and span so they can play and jump around."

Despite the good news, the outlook is tough. One elderly couple used to live in the town with six other family members but the family has been scattered. Fears about radiation have prompted the couple's son and his family to find a new home outside the town.

Rebuilding the town faces more challenges. Many supermarkets and other stores have been closed since the disaster.

Lifting the evacuation order did not mean hospitals or other welfare service centers would reopen at the same time. Elderly people voiced their concern over the reduced health services.

The government expects to lift more evacuation orders in nearby towns for 70,000 people who are forced to live away from home.

Naraha town was given a head start. But challenges lie ahead to ensure people can reclaim the sense of security and comfort they cherished before the nuclear crisis.

Is Nahara viable?

September 9, 2015

Under radioactive shadow of Fukushima, town of Naraha tries to come back to life

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/09/09/national/social-issues/radioactive-shadow-fukushima-town-naraha-tries-come-back-life/#.Ve_Stpfwmic

by Mari Yamaguchi

AP

NARAHARA, FUKUSHIMA PREF. – A few signs of life are returning to this rural town made desolate by the Fukushima nuclear disaster 4½ years ago: Carpenters bang on houses, an occasional delivery truck drives

by and a noodle shop has opened to serve employees who have returned to the small town hall in Naraha, Fukushima Prefecture.

But weeds cover the now rusty train tracks, there are no sounds of children and wild boars still roam around at night. On the outskirts of town, thousands of black industrial storage bags containing radiation-contaminated soil and debris stretch out across barren fields.

This past weekend, Naraha became the first of seven towns that had been entirely evacuated to reopen since the March 11, 2011, disaster, when tsunami slammed into the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, causing meltdowns and massive radiation leaks.

The town's viability is far from certain, and its fate will be watched closely by authorities and neighboring towns to see if recovery is indeed possible on this once-abandoned land.

Just over a tenth of Naraha's population of 7,400 say they plan to move back soon, and only a few hundred have actually returned, most of them senior citizens. Schools won't reopen for another two years, and many families with children are staying away due to concerns about radiation levels, which authorities say are below the annual allowable limit. Residents are given personal dosimeters to check their own radiation levels if they want.

One thing that won't change is the town's dependence on the nuclear industry — only this time it will involve dismantling damaged reactors, not building and running them.

An economic revival plan centers on a giant ¥85 billion facility that is being built on the edge of town to research, develop and test specialized robots and other technology — **part of the government's "Innovation Coast" plan to turn the disaster-hit region into a hub for nuclear plant decommissioning technology.**

The complex will include mock-ups of sections of the wrecked Fukushima reactors to train workers on robot operations. Dismantling the No. 1 plant and removing its melted reactor cores will take about 40 years, the government estimates.

The facility is expected to draw hundreds of workers, and the town also seeks to host laborers to decontaminate buildings and outdoor areas in the region. Naraha is also home to a second nuclear power plant — Fukushima No. 2 — that barely survived the tsunami but may be scrapped due to local opposition to its restart. So it may also be dismantled.

Returning residents are determined to make a go of it, but they wonder if the town will survive economically — and mourn that it will never be the same cozy place it was five years ago.

"There are more decontamination workers than townspeople. It's like we've been taken over," said carpenter Koichi Takeda, who evacuated to the nearby city of Iwaki and was in town to help a friend clean her house.

He has a number of clients renovating their houses in Naraha, but most of them are undecided about whether they will actually return. "It's like keeping a vacation home here," he said.

The southern edge of Naraha already hosts a soccer park called J-Village where temporary dormitories have been erected to house thousands of workers at the No. 1 plant. Some residents, especially women, say they feel intimidated by a growing number of male workers from outside the town, citing the recent arrest of a former decontamination worker in another town of Fukushima in a murder case.

"I'm more concerned about security in town rather than the shortage of groceries and other inconveniences," said Yukiko Takano, 43, who runs a mobile cafe out of her van near the town hall.

Tokuo Hayakawa, a 75-year-old Buddhist monk who returned with his wife, said he wasn't very optimistic about the town's future.

"The town's reconstruction plan seems to be mainly for people from outside," he said. "If I were in my 20s or 30s, I wouldn't have returned. But at my old age I don't have time and energy to start over elsewhere."

Other elderly residents said they felt sad about not being able to invite grandchildren anytime soon given radiation concerns for kids.

"I was so sad to hear that my daughter said she can't bring her child here," said Takeo Suzuki, 63, getting teary. "She grew up here and this is her home. We built this place for her to come back when she wants to."

Some 100,000 people from about 10 municipalities around the wrecked nuclear plant still cannot go home. Many have moved to apartments or houses elsewhere, and some live in temporary housing built by the government.

The government hopes to lift all evacuation orders except for the most contaminated areas around the plant by March, 2017, offering up to ¥100,000 per household for moving back. But evacuees criticize the plan as a public relations stunt to showcase Fukushima's recovery ahead of the Tokyo 2020 Games.

Sections of two other towns reopened last year, but only half of their populations have since returned.

Naoko Kanai, a 50-year-old homemaker, is among those wrestling with whether to return to Naraha.

Kanai, who lost her job at a manufacturing company office in town that closed after the disaster, was back Saturday to check her house for the first time in about two months. Previously, she had said she had no intention of moving back as her family had resettled in nearby Iwaki.

But as she opened the living room curtains to let in the air, her emotions wavered.

"This is not just a house, it's filled with memories of my family and its history," Kanai said. "I remember how we talked about the design of this house, the color of the curtain when we first moved in. This is where I packed lunch for my boys."

Her older son has since married and doesn't want to come back with his baby. But her second son keeps his room almost the way it was in 2011 — his high school uniform hangs in the closet, a bookshelf filled with comic books, and a blanket folded on his bed.

"He wants to come back," Kanai said. "I can't abandon this place."

"We don't have anywhere to go"

Disaster returns

September 11, 2015

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/features/201509111606.html>

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150911_28.html

70,000 still in temporary housing

September 12, 2015

Nearly 70,000 evacuees still living in shoddy temporary housing

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201509120035>



Temporary housing units cover wide areas of the Kaisei and Minamizakai districts of Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture. (Yosuke Fukudome)

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Tens of thousands of evacuees from the earthquake and tsunami disaster in 2011 are still living in temporary shelters designed to last only two years.

Most of the 68,000 evacuees are from the hardest-hit prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima. Temporary prefabricated housing was erected hastily because so many people lost their homes and livelihoods in the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake and ensuing towering tsunami that devastated northeastern Japan.

Under the central government's system to help victims of natural disasters, such prefabricated homes are to be used, in principle, for just two years.

The scale of the disaster led to delays in constructing more permanent public housing for those made homeless.

Many of the communities devastated by the tsunami in Iwate and Miyagi prefectures are trying to build new public housing units for disaster victims on higher ground, but that is proving difficult because the coastal areas are so flat.

In the case of the Great Hanshin Earthquake in 1995, all evacuees had left temporary housing and were relocated in 25,000 public housing units just five years after the disaster.

It has been estimated that 29,501 public housing units need to be built for the victims of the 2011 disaster. But as of July, only 11,000 units had been completed.

Officials say construction of all the needed public housing will likely not be completed until fiscal 2018.

Many of those still living in the temporary housing units are senior citizens or those on low incomes who face difficulties in finding other housing on their own.

That is one reason there has only been a 40 percent decrease in the number of evacuees from the peak figure in March 2012. About 199,000 people are still living as evacuees.

About 10 percent of those in Iwate and Miyagi prefectures living in temporary housing either said they were unsure where they would go after leaving those units or local government officials could not confirm the intentions of the evacuees.

In Fukushima Prefecture, about 20,000 evacuees live in temporary housing units. Because nine local communities are still covered by evacuation orders due to the Fukushima nuclear accident that was triggered by the earthquake and tsunami disaster, about 70,000 residents are unable to return to their homes.

In a related development, the Fire and Disaster Management Agency updated its figures on the number of dead and missing from the 2011 disasters to 21,955 as of Sept. 1 against 18,554 on Sept 12, 2012. It said the number of fatalities includes those who died while living as evacuees.

New PLOS ONE study

September 12, 2015

Evacuation of Fukushima elderly riskier than then-exposure to radiation: study

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/09/12/national/science-health/nursing-home-evacuation-fukushima-accident-higher-radiation-risk-study/#.VfW_ZpfwlLN

by Tomoko Otake
Staff Writer

Following the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and the ensuing nuclear disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant, hundreds of nursing-home residents and staffers living close to the plant rushed to evacuate.

But, according to the results of a joint study published Friday in the science journal PLOS ONE, the evacuations posed a far greater health risk to the evacuees than the radiation they would have endured had they decided to stay.

Co-author Masaharu Tsubokura, a University of Tokyo researcher, said the study should be used as a resource in evacuation planning, as many of the nation's nuclear power plants are waiting for the green light to restart operations.

The researchers, led by Michio Murakami of the University of Tokyo, examined the risks for 191 residents and 184 staffers at three nursing homes 20 to 30 km away from the plant, outside the compulsory evacuation zone.

While all nursing home residents chose to be evacuated due to radiation fears, concerns over the plant's stability and a lack of resources such as medical drugs, the decision ended up boosting the number of deaths due to the burden of the evacuation itself, changes in medical staff members and a lack of preparation at the sites where patients were sent.

The researchers calculated the “loss of life expectancy” under four scenarios: the next-day evacuation, which is what happened; delayed evacuation three months later; and nonevacuation scenarios with first-year radiation exposures of 20 and 100 millisieverts.

The results showed the next-day evacuation was 400 times more detrimental to the evacuees’ life expectancy than delayed evacuation, and riskier than scenarios where they stayed and were exposed to radiation, which is known to increase the risk of developing cancer.

“The purpose of the study is not to discuss whether the evacuation was appropriate or not,” said Tsubokura. “The study shows that, in preparing for nuclear disasters, evacuation-tied risks need to be reduced through detailed planning in advance.”

Timing evacuation orders

September 12, 2015

Editorial: Local authorities should reconsider timing of issuing safety evacuation orders

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20150912p2a00m0na020000c.html>

The record rainfall that hit eastern Japan inundated extensive areas of residential neighborhoods after floodwaters broke through embankments of the Kinugawa River in Joso, Ibaraki Prefecture, and the Shibui River in Miyagi Prefecture. In addition, many people went missing following the partial collapse of the Kinugawa River dike.

Numerous people tuned in to the live broadcasts of residents being rescued by helicopters in the desperate relief efforts that took place in disaster-hit areas, where people remain stranded in their houses and other locations.

Central and local governments, as well as other relevant authorities, are urged first and foremost to put all of their efforts into search and rescue operations for missing or stranded residents, as well as provide support for evacuees’ livelihoods.

The collapse of the Kinugawa River’s embankment raises serious concerns, considering that the first-class river is under the jurisdiction of the central government. In disaster prevention, it is essential to work toward improving infrastructure as well as strengthening measures for evacuation and other necessary actions.

The flooding came just after authorities had embarked on land purchases for planned construction work that was aimed at elevating the very embankments that broke in order to cope with “once-in-a-decade flooding.” While it may be true that priorities were in place in terms of infrastructure improvements, officials should seriously examine whether any blind spots existed within their daily management of the embankments, as well as the safety checks thereof.

In 2013, the Japan Meteorological Agency introduced a system of “emergency warnings” for downpours and other serious weather situations that normally occur around once every several decades.

In Ibaraki Prefecture, an emergency heavy rain warning was issued at 7:45 a.m. on Sept. 10. Under the law, prefectural governments are obliged to transmit such warnings to municipal governments, which are then tasked with passing them on to local residents.

In some districts in Joso, however, evacuation orders were not issued until several hours after the weather agency's emergency warning announcement was made. Faced with this reality, we must question the extent to which residents were actually aware of the crisis at hand.

Authorities should interview affected residents to verify what problems lay behind the means of information dissemination and the timing of the evacuation warnings that were issued. The results of such conversations must then serve as the lessons learned from the recent flooding disaster.

The unexpectedly severe rainfall was brought on by the lengthy stagnation of the so-called "line-shaped precipitation band," which comprises huge masses of cumulonimbus clouds. This reminds us of a similar case whereby massive landslides claimed the lives of many residents in the city of Hiroshima last year. It is said to be difficult to predict precisely when and where the line-shaped precipitation band will emerge. Experts point out that such climate cases will increase due to global warming, so it is all the more imperative to develop disaster response measures by assuming a worst-case scenario and then taking a proactive approach.

In the United States, some state governments have set out a rule to issue an evacuation advisory -- as well as suspend public transport systems -- a certain number of hours before a hurricane landfall. Such advance anti-disaster action plans are called timelines, and some local governments in Japan have undertaken similar initiatives at the urging of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism. If local governments make prior timeline arrangements regarding the measures that should be taken in the event that the meteorological agency issues an emergency warning, they would not have to worry about their evacuation orders ending up being in vain even if such orders turned out to have been unnecessary. Such arrangements should be considered by local governments across the country. It is up to each individual whether or not they will be able to survive disasters when they occur. Citizens need to learn the risks present in their residential areas by looking at hazard maps, regularly joining in disaster drills, and preparing emergency supplies so that they can evacuate quickly in times of emergency. [Click here for Japanese article](#)

Drawing the lessons of disasters

September 15, 2015

Learning from natural disasters

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2015/09/15/editorials/learning-natural-disasters/>

People listed as missing after last week's flooding of the Kinugawa River in Joso, Ibaraki Prefecture have been located alive. The next priority will be reconstructing the breached riverbank, pumping out water from the inundated areas, cleaning up the debris and restoring lifelines such as power and water supplies for local residents. Also important will be a review of the actions taken by the local administrators as well as residents to protect their lives — so that damage can be minimized in the event of similar disasters in the future.

In recent years, abnormal weather phenomena such as typhoons, torrential rainfall and twisters are happening in greater frequency and severity, which is often associated with the effects of global warming. We increasingly hear of severe weather described as "unprecedented" or the "heaviest in decades." It most

cases, both residents and officials of the municipalities in affected areas will have had no firsthand experience of a disaster of such magnitude.

Last week's flooding was caused by record-breaking torrential rains that hit the Kanto and Tohoku regions. The last time the Kinugawa River, which flows through northern Kanto, breached its embankments was reportedly in 1949. Many of the residents as well as officials in the city, which is some 50 km from downtown Tokyo, may not have imagined that the levee along the river would fail on Thursday, even though the Meteorological Agency had issued special alert for heavy rain and flooding for broad areas including the city the previous afternoon.

Nearly five hours before the levee ruptured, the agency also issued a special warning for people in Ibaraki Prefecture to "take immediate actions" to protect their lives. Such a warning was introduced in 2013 after authorities determined that local residents were not adequately informed of the danger of flooding when torrential rains hit the Kii Peninsula in 2011 and northern Kyushu the following year, each of which resulted in large numbers of casualties. When dozens of people in mountainside residential area of the city of Hiroshima were killed in mudslides caused by downpours in nighttime hours in August last year, it was pointed out that local officials hesitated too long before they issued an evacuation advisory for the residents.

It has surfaced that the Joso municipal government issued an evacuation order for residents in areas along the river closest to the section where the bank ruptured roughly two hours after the levee breached, even though a similar order had been made hours earlier for people in nearby areas. The city has admitted error and confusion on its part. Evacuation advisory and order by the local authorities would have prodded more residents to flee, and it needs to be closely examined why the order was issued so late. But it also needs to be reviewed whether the residents themselves had been adequately prepared for safe evacuations in cases of emergencies.

Natural disasters result in extensive damage when the events go beyond what people expect based on their own experience. To protect ourselves against unprecedented disasters, we need to guard against the worst-case scenario and act promptly. Municipal government authorities should also learn from past examples and take adequate action, such as issuing evacuation orders while it's still safe for the residents to evacuate — for example before the weather gets severe — not after the danger becomes imminent. How to safely evacuate elderly and disabled residents as well as small children in emergency situations must also be considered.

There will be limits to beefing up infrastructure to defend against natural disasters. Though necessary, there will be no end to efforts to make it robust enough to protect people in the event of disasters. Since the 2012 torrential rains in northern Kyushu, the Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Ministry has surveyed the conditions of levees along rivers under national government control that stretch a total of 13,390 km across the country, and determined that 16 percent of the embankments — or a stretch of 2,159 km — was vulnerable and needed work to make them stronger.

However, the progress of the work remains slow and there is not timetable for when it will be completed, due partly to the cutbacks on public works spending in recent years. In fact, work to strengthen the embankments along the Kinugawa River was under way just downstream from the site of last week's disaster, with work at the site itself reportedly scheduled next. It will be difficult to eliminate the risk of flooding through infrastructure improvements.

The land ministry is urging more than 700 municipalities across Japan with the risk of flooding in their areas to devise a plan of action that should be taken by the local governments and residents to ensure a safe evacuation in advance of natural disasters, with specific timelines for what action needs to be taken by whom and when, by fiscal 2020. However, only about 200 municipalities have so far compiled such

plans. In addition to speeding up the process, the municipalities need to constantly update their plans based on the lessons of others who have experienced disasters. Drills involving local residents will also be essential to see if the plans really work.

With the increasing severity of abnormal weather conditions, some disasters will be beyond the ability of a single municipality to handle. It is reportedly estimated that as many as 1.2 million people would be affected if the right bank of the Arakawa River in Tokyo's Kita Ward ruptured. The national and prefectural governments will need to take on greater roles in devising and executing plans for protection and evacuation of people in the event of major disasters.

Govt help for Nahara residents

September 19, 2015

Govt. to help Naraha Town residents to return home

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Sep. 19, 2015 - Updated 19:34 UTC+2

Japan's reconstruction minister has visited a town near the damaged Fukushima nuclear plant, 2 weeks after its residents were allowed to return from evacuation.

The evacuation order for Naraha Town was lifted on September 5th, enabling residents to return for the first time in 4 and-a-half years.

Naraha is the first of the communities from where residents completely evacuated following the 2011 nuclear disaster to lift the evacuation order.

For the first time since the order was lifted, Reconstruction Minister Wataru Takeshita visited the town on Saturday.

He spoke with residents and inspected the town, accompanied by Mayor Yukiei Matsumoto.

Takeshita later told reporters that he could feel the clock ticking again. He indicated that the government will help the residents smoothly return. He said that will serve as a major reference for other municipalities when evacuation orders are lifted.

Naraha Town officials say about 200 residents are thought to have returned since the evacuation order was lifted. About 7,000 are still living outside the town.

The government plans to accelerate efforts to restore living conditions by reopening schools and setting up medical facilities, while continuing decontamination work.

Just "hoping for inspired improvisation"

September 19, 2015

Rearranging the deck chairs on the nuclear Titanic

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2015/09/19/commentary/rearranging-deck-chairs-nuclear-titanic/#.Vf6xP5fwmic>

by Jeff Kingston

The International Atomic Energy Agency's recently released postmortem on the Fukushima nuclear accident of 2011 makes for grim reading and serves as a timely reminder of why the restart of the Sendai nuclear plant in Kyushu is a bad idea.

When an atomic energy advocacy organization delivers multiple harsh assessments of Japan's woeful nuclear safety culture and inadequate emergency countermeasures and disaster management protocols, it's time to wonder how much has really changed in the past five years — and whether restarting any of the nation's nuclear reactors is a good idea.

In 2012, the government established a new nuclear safety watchdog agency called the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) and it now contends that Japan has the strictest nuclear safety regulations in the world. But is that true? And does it matter?

David Lochbaum, co-author of last year's "Fukushima: The Story of a Nuclear Disaster," the best book on the meltdowns that I've read, likens recent reforms to "rearranging the deck chairs on the nuclear Titanic." He's not buying Japan's claim of having the world's strictest guidelines.

"I'd sooner buy the Brooklyn Bridge," Lochbaum says. "What would Japan have said about its safety guidelines on March 10, 2011? Would they have conceded that their safety guidelines ranked 23rd worldwide, but that level of protection was good enough for the people of Japan?"

"It's all valueless posturing. No regulator in any country would publicly confess to anything less than the best on the planet."

Had the NRA existed pre-Fukushima, Lochbaum thinks the disaster would have shown that structure to be inadequate.

"The NRA would have been splintered and its roles relegated to various governmental agencies," he says.

At the time, however, responsibility and authority for nuclear safety was divided among various agencies, so the government moved to concentrate such powers under the NRA and calls that a solution.

“Disasters are bad and require changes,” Lochbaum says. “That the changes fail to address the underlying problems gets lost.”

However, Japan is not the only nation “rearranging the nuclear deck chairs” to conjure a simulacrum of enhanced safety, and Lochbaum points to an incident in 2008 in Pennsylvania as an example.

“When contract security officers were discovered sleeping on the job at the Peach Bottom nuclear plant, its owner fired the contractor and brought the security officers in-house,” he says. “It was essentially the same group of individuals wearing different emblems on their uniforms. But somehow the different emblems ‘fixed’ the problem and all was well with the world.”

A relevant story since **most of the NRA’s employees used to work at the discredited Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, which was blamed for poor oversight and safety lapses due to regulatory capture and servile deference to the utilities.**

“It’s more convenient than truthful to blame Fukushima on regulatory capture,” Lochbaum says. “I am unaware of any reactor type operated by any company in any nation that would have survived the one-two punch that the earthquake and tsunami dealt that plant.” Yet, it is disconcerting to know that according to Lochbaum, “Fukushima’s design and operating procedures were not radically different than those deployed worldwide.”

Both the IAEA report and Lochbaum emphasize the need for defense in depth, meaning multiple levels of safety infrastructure, equipment and redundancy to reduce the possibility of a nuclear accident.

Defense in depth depends on manifold barriers that lessen risk, but Lochbaum points out all the barriers that failed at Fukushima: off-site power was lost, on-site power was lost, backup on-site power could not be deployed in time, the protective sea wall was insufficient, and more.

“Had just one of these barriers worked, Fukushima would not have happened,” Lochbaum says. “There was simply not enough what-iffing going on” — what the IAEA describes as a “failure to challenge existing safety systems.”

By not preparing for the worst and relying on probabilistic scenarios based on overly optimistic assumptions, the IAEA implies that Japan’s nuclear regulators and plant operators were derelict in their duties. There is a danger that the NRA, in touting its new safety regime, is yet again nurturing a myth of safety.

“When our guesses are good, the ‘strictest regulations’ look real good,” Lochbaum says. “When our guesses are bad, it must be regulatory capture or centralized governance, or de-centralized governance, or whatever lame excuse wanders by.”

The NRA will still rely extensively on plant operators reporting and self-inspections to ensure compliance with regulations. Given that all the utilities operating reactors admitted they faked their repair and maintenance data, why trust them now?

Lochbaum also notes the huge discrepancies between safety assessments by the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission and plant operators. He likens safety goals to nuclear speed limits, but these are meaningless since the government's radar gun and the utilities' speedometers are way out of line. The closest match has a radar reading of a utility doing 110 miles per hour when it claimed it was following the 55 mile-per-hour speed limit. But at another nuclear plant at Watts Bar in Tennessee, when the "atomic speedometer showed 55 miles per hour, the NRC's radar gun indicated a smokin' fast 42,853 miles per hour!"

He concludes that existing risk-assessment models "cannot be used for anything other than amusing storytelling and nonproductive time-wasting until their results have closer agreement. **Differing by factors of 2 to 800 about risks doesn't allow risk-informed decision-making.** It supports risk-deformed decision-making."

And don't bank on Japan's reactor stress tests or other new measures such as taller sea walls, longer-duration batteries and other incremental upgrades.

"Individually and collectively, (those things) hedge our guesses and make it less likely that a bad guess will trigger another nuclear disaster," Lochbaum says. However, "As long as **protective barriers are determined by guesswork without the 'what if' backups**, nuclear disasters will continue to happen."

The IAEA says there is no room for complacency about nuclear safety, but **it fails to call Japan out for a major flaw in its disaster emergency preparedness.** It details the need for a proper emergency evacuation organization, training and drills, but under current rules this is the responsibility of local hosting towns, one that exceeds their limited capacity — especially now that the evacuation zones around nuclear plants have been expanded to 30 km. Simulations of evacuations under optimistic assumptions underscore that people living inside the evacuation zone will be exposed to significant radiation because transport networks will be jammed. And if we factor in a volcanic eruption depositing a thick layer of ash and a simultaneous tsunami wiping out coastal roads, the evacuation would be disastrous.

The Titanic was also ill-prepared to evacuate its passengers because it failed to consider the unimaginable and thus mismanaged the risk. It seems the lessons of Fukushima are also being ignored in favor of wishing away risk, and **hoping for inspired improvisation.** There is thus good reason why citizens across Japan are filing lawsuits to block reactor restarts and some gutsy judges are resisting pressure from the nuclear village and siding with common sense.

Tsunami walls block the view

September 21, 2015

Tohoku residents see red over unsightly tsunami barriers

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201509210033>



A man looks through a window in a tsunami barrier in Kesennuma, Miyagi Prefecture, in July. (Yosuke Fukudome)

By YOSUKE FUKUDOME/ Staff Writer

As massive tsunami sea walls go up along the shores of the Tohoku region, many residents are complaining that these concrete slabs are an eyesore and block their ocean view.

In the fishing port of Yamada, Iwate Prefecture, the barriers measure 7.5 meters high and stretch 1.61 kilometers along the coastline, obstructing the view of the ocean.

"The scenery I used to know was taken away completely when the barriers were installed," said a man who runs a store in a seaside shopping arcade.

The concrete sea walls are gradually being constructed along the 400 km of coastline in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures in Japan's northeastern region, where many communities were devastated by the tsunami generated by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake. The massive project has a budget of about 1 trillion yen (\$8.35 billion).

A sea wall measuring 10 meters high and 660 meters wide is also going up in Iwate's Rikuzentakata.

The area where the sea wall is being built is a restricted zone where residential construction is not allowed. The concrete barrier will protect several marine products facilities operating in the area.

"There's no need for such a thing when nobody is going to live in the area," a 75-year-old resident said.

"The budget could be used for something else if they just repaired the old sea wall instead that was damaged in the disaster."

In Kesennuma, Miyagi Prefecture, the design of its new 6.4-meter high sea wall was revised after residents complained that they could no longer see the ocean. Small rectangular acrylic glass windows measuring 60 centimeters by 1.5 meters will be installed in the sea wall.

"These windows are to see the ocean?" a 59-year-old factory worker said. "I thought they were there to let some of the water out when a tsunami comes to relieve the pressure."

Kagura Shinto music for Fukushima souls

September 22, 2015

Fukushima artists prepare new Shinto 'kagura' performance for souls of disaster victims

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/09/22/national/fukushima-artists-prepare-new-shinto-kagura-performance-for-souls-of-disaster-victims/#.VgFUwpfwmic>

JJI

FUKUSHIMA – A project is underway in Fukushima Prefecture to produce an original *kagura* Shinto music and dance performance to console the souls of the victims of the March 2011 catastrophe.

Kagura is a performing art thought to date back to the Heian Period (794-1185).

The project was launched at the initiative of Ryoichi Wago, a 46-year-old poet and high school teacher in Fukushima.

Wago and his collaborators are currently in rehearsals for the performance, which will be dedicated next Sunday to the grand guardian god of Inari Jinja Shrine in the city of Fukushima. In the performance, Wago will recite an original poem and dancers will perform to music.

His poem depicts the Abukuma River morphing into a dragon, which writhes in pain after swallowing soil and water contaminated with radioactive substances, but eventually reaches heaven. The river runs through Fukushima Prefecture.

Wago has been using Twitter to give updates on the conditions in Fukushima, which was struck by an earthquake and tsunami as well as fallout from the triple meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. He took his cue for the kagura project from a friend who traveled to Fukushima's tsunami-devastated coast in commemoration of the victims. The friend told Wago that existing ritual prayers offered to the Shinto god do not necessarily communicate the feelings of Fukushima residents to disaster victims and asked him to draw up a new prayer for the repose of their souls.

Wago recalled a kagura performed by students of a high school in the coastal city of Minamisoma, which he worked for in his 20s.

He marshaled 30 dancers, a choreographer, a composer, a *wadaiko* drummer, a flute player, and other artists, most of them living in Fukushima Prefecture or natives of it.

A number of indigenous kagura have been passed down through the generations across Japan, but it is rare for an original one to be written, Wago said.

"I hope it will become a new form of tradition that reflects local people's feelings about the disaster and can be taken over by the children of the future," Wago said. "It also represents our share of efforts to prevent (the disaster) from being forgotten."

Junichi Kimura, the performance director, said, "I want to produce a space and time that would give spectators an illusion that a nostalgic future has appeared."

Wago said he hopes the work will have a global impact.

"It may sound like I'm talking big," he said. "But we Fukushima people will create it, communicate it in Japan and overseas and develop it into a performance that will draw spectators from across Japan and the world."

He has a grand vision of creating 88 new kagura over 30 years.

The vision has impressed some observers.

"This initiative can be regarded as an archetype of a festival or a performing art," said Toji Kamata, professor of religious philosophy and folklore at Kyoto University. "It's also meaningful in that the project was initiated by people in Fukushima who are directly associated with the disaster, instead of people outside.

"I think the project won't end with one performance and will be sustained if it gains the sympathy of many people," Kamata added.

Admission is free, but organizer Miraino Matsuri Fukushima (Future Festival Fukushima) says donations are welcome.

Its website, which solicits contributions, is www.mirainomatsuri-fukushima.jp

Fukushima preservation project

September 24, 2015

Evacuees, students help empty Fukushima town preserve its history

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201509240003>

By MAKOTO TAKADA/ Staff Writer

KORIYAMA, Fukushima Prefecture--Local government officials, evacuees and students are saving personal documents and other historical materials from destruction in a municipality rendered a virtual "ghost town" by the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

The Tomioka town government, which now operates from Koriyama in Fukushima Prefecture, has asked residents for help in the preservation project, saying materials kept at a museum alone cannot show the entire picture and history of local people's lives.

Although they now live in other municipalities, **Tomioka residents have so far provided the town government nearly 10,000 historical materials, including many from the late Edo Period (1603-1867) to the Showa Era (1926-1989).**

Handwritten letters, a book on women's morals, traditional Japanese "kacchu" armor and a photo of a ceremony celebrating the renovation of a local school in the Meiji Era (1868-1912) are among the personal materials that have been offered.

Many items were kept at warehouses of long-established families or merchants in Tomioka.

"We want our citizens to know anew the history and culture of our town," said Hidefumi Sanpei, 36, a member of the town preservation project team.

The entire town of Tomioka, which had around 16,000 residents in 2010, was evacuated after the disaster unfolded at the nearby Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011.

Since then, many empty houses in Tomioka have fallen into disrepair or been demolished.

Fearing the loss of precious historical materials at these homes, the town government formed the project team in June 2014.

In August this year, **the town government concluded an agreement with Fukushima University to preserve the materials.** Students at the university had been engaged in the preservation activities since November 2014.

On Sept. 16, researchers and 15 students from Fukushima University gathered in a branch facility of the town government's temporary office in Koriyama for their third meeting.

The students numbered the materials, took digital photos and created catalogs.

"This is a valuable experience," said Naoki Yamaoka, 22, a senior at the university who hopes to become a public servant after graduation.

"Our students can implement what they learned in their classes, including one on archiving," said Tsuyoshi Tokutake, a 35-year-old associate professor of local history at the university. "They can also contribute to the local society."

Rebuilding Fukushima's dairy industry

September 26, 2015

Fukushima dairy farmers to restart shipments

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/09/26/national/fukushima-dairy-farmers-to-restart-shipments/#.VgZms5fwmic>

JJI

FUKUSHIMA – Dairy farmers who were forced to suspend business following the 2011 nuclear accident at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 power plant plan to restart milk shipments as early as this year, with a new large-scale stock farm completed in the city of Fukushima on Friday.

Fully supported by the government and the prefectural dairy cooperative association, the stock farm, with 580 cows, is expected to become **a foothold for rebuilding the prefecture's dairy industry**, hit hard by business closures and radiation-related rumors.

The farm is operated by a company established jointly by five dairy farmers from Minamisoma, Namie and Iitate. Kazumasa Tanaka, 44, from Iitate, has been appointed president of the company.

The company aims to produce 5,000 tons of raw milk annually under a computer-based control system on the 3.6-hectare (8.9-acre) farm.

"I have chosen to do this because of a sense of responsibility for the rebuilding of the dairy industry in Fukushima," Tanaka said at a completion ceremony. "It will be the happiest thing to cheer up our peers by our stock farm getting on a growth path."

Following the triple meltdown at the nuclear plant triggered by the massive earthquake and tsunami in March 2011, **76 dairy farmers had to evacuate and suspend their operations. Among them, only 13 farmers have restarted their businesses.**

In the prefecture, annual production of raw milk remains sluggish at around 80,000 tons, down 20 percent from before the disaster.

The new stock farm was developed and is owned by the prefectural dairy cooperative, which is subsidized by the central and prefectural governments.

To stay or not to stay



September 29, 2015

Reluctant to speak, Fukushima moms admit fear of radiation, pressure from families

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/09/29/national/social-issues/reluctant-speak-fukushima-moms-admit-fear-radiation-pressure-families/#.Vgowz5fwmid>

by Megan Green

Staff Writer

To stay or to flee.

Mothers in Fukushima had to make harsh decisions for their families after the nuclear disaster of March, 2011. More than four years on, they still have to.

Those who remained in Fukushima Prefecture live in constant fear for their children's health. But choosing to flee opens them to accusations of being bad wives who abandoned their relatives, community and husbands tied to jobs.

It is a no-win situation for those who face the decision to stay or go, because they may be unable to live up to the ideal of a *ryosai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother).

"Consciously or subconsciously, women are aware of the role we are expected to play in a family. After the earthquake and nuclear disaster, however, everything changed," said Yukiko (not her real name), a

mother and voluntary evacuee in her 30s. “I can’t live up to those expectations any more, and society judges me.”

All women interviewed for this story spoke on condition of anonymity.

As the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant began to play out, Tokyo Electric Power Co. established a 20-km no-go zone around the site, outside of which the government said conditions were safe. Many did not believe the assertion.

As the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant began to play out, Tokyo Electric Power Co. established a 20-km no-go zone around the site, outside of which the government said conditions were safe. Many did not believe the assertion.

Yuriko, a woman in her 70s who lives in Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, believes the zone restrictions divided the community.

“Some people trusted the government’s word and continued to live here, but others couldn’t stand living every day in fear and moved out,” Yuriko said. “Nobody knew what to believe and communities have fallen apart.”

The fear of radiation, rumors and media reports about the safety of local food prompted many mothers just outside the no-go zone to evacuate voluntarily for the sake of their children’s health. Some moved to neighboring prefectures, including Iwate and Miyagi, and others made the great leap south to Tokyo.

“To be honest, I didn’t have much knowledge about the nuclear reactors in Fukushima. But I did know how deadly high exposures of radiation could be,” said Yuko, in her 30s, who has a 6-year-old daughter. “I evacuated to Tokyo within a week of the disaster. My husband stayed in Fukushima, but I was determined to leave to prioritize the safety of my daughter.”

In many cases, voluntary evacuees like Yuko are mothers who fled with their children while their husbands remained in Fukushima to work.

Some were accused of abandoning or running away from their families, particularly those they married into. Relatives labeled the wives disloyal and overly sensitive.

The worried mothers meanwhile believe they are wise to protect their children from radiation exposure. But with no concrete scientific or medical proof to justify their decision to flee, they often feel guilty for leaving a tight-knit community.

“Every time I go up to visit my hometown in Fukushima for a funeral or a traditional holiday, I’m always asked the same question by my relatives,” Yuko said.

“‘When are you moving back home?’ they ask. ‘It’s safe now.’ The relationship I have with my family has become distant.”

Even those who evacuated to Tokyo may not find life any better.

The government helps evacuees whose homes were within the 20-kilometer zone with free accommodation and a monthly stipend. But voluntary evacuees do not qualify for this and thus struggle to make a living.

Life is just as difficult for mothers who remain in Fukushima. They have constant qualms about the invisible dangers of radiation and about whether they made the right choice by staying.

Some said they decided to stay for the sake of their husbands, to avoid separating the family. Some, like Hiroko, felt they had no choice — they had no money to evacuate, they could not find housing for a family of five with pets, and had a life in Fukushima they did not want to risk losing.

“It is strange because **nobody talks about their worries dealing with 3/11**,” said Hiroko, a 30-something who now lives in the town of Kashima, Fukushima Prefecture. “It’s almost like the disaster never happened and people erased the crucial reality.”

Mothers who stay also face being branded as bad.

“Sometimes when I’m alone in the house, I start to cry, imagining the future of my children,” Hiroko said. “I fear my children may become sick, and the ones who I love most will hold a grudge against me for failing to protect them. That is my biggest fear.”

As reconstruction speeds up in the prefecture, with posters everywhere boasting slogans such as “Ganbaro Nippon” (Stick it out, Japan) or “Gambaro Fukushima,” **there is pressure on mothers to keep their worries to themselves.**

What has saved some mothers are peer support groups — organizations specifically created for women to share information and give each other mutual support.

Among them is **Beteran Mama no Kai** (Veteran Mom’s Group), an organization based in both Fukushima and Tokyo.

The group’s main goal is to encourage mothers who were victims of 3/11 to speak to other women in a similar situation and make connections. Monthly events are held to check up on each other and to relieve stress.

Akiko was among the women who joined the group.

“I was able to speak to other women about topics I would have never been able to talk about on a daily basis, such as food regulations or radiation levels,” Akiko said. “I was able to make friends within the group, and I don’t feel so alone anymore.”

Academic experts say women have long been known to suffer heavily following a trauma like this.

“A disaster such as Fukushima is not a single event, but a period of struggle that continues to change over time,” said David Slater, professor of anthropology at Sophia University. “And **women often carry the heaviest burden**, working behind the scenes.”

While mothers who live in Fukushima fear for their children’s health and dread health checkups because of the risk of getting a bad diagnosis, those who voluntarily evacuated to Tokyo are contemplating whether to move back up north.

Some mothers worry that their children need a father figure in their lives.

Moreover, balancing two households, in Fukushima and Tokyo, is financially and emotionally difficult — and there is always the **emotional pressure from relatives in Fukushima nagging them about their return.** Yet, some fear returning.

“If I am forced to move back to Fukushima, I have to pretend I don’t care about radiation — when I actually do,” said Yuko, the Tokyo evacuee.

Namie residents sue TEPCO

September 30, 2015

117 Fukushima town residents sue TEPCO, gov't over nuclear disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150930p2a00m0na015000c.html>

KORIYAMA, Fukushima -- Over 100 residents of Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, affected by the Fukushima nuclear crisis, have jointly sued Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the operator of the crippled nuclear plant, and the central government.

The 117 individuals from 32 households in the Tsushima district of the town, designated by the government as **a zone where residents will likely be unable to return in the foreseeable future**, filed their

suit with the Koriyama branch of the Fukushima District Court on Sept. 29. **They are demanding that their hometown be restored to its original state through decontamination work and that the defendants pay them a total of some 6.5 billion yen in damages.**

This is the first class action by residents of an area designated a "difficult-to-return zone" because of the nuclear disaster, according to the attorneys for the plaintiffs.

In their suit, the plaintiffs are demanding that the whole Tsushima district be decontaminated to **reduce radiation levels to 1 millisievert per year -- internationally regarded as the upper limit on exposure to radiation, excluding that which exists in nature and the amount that people are exposed to in medical treatments and checkups -- by March 2020.** The residents are also demanding 30 million yen each in compensation if the defendants fail to meet the deadline for decontamination, citing the difficulty of rebuilding the community if the time limit is not met.

They are also **asking that the compensation they are receiving for mental anguish be increased** from the current 100,000 yen each a month to 350,000 yen. Moreover, they are calling for an additional 3 million yen each in damages for what they say was unnecessary exposure to radiation due to the defendants' failure to release their predictions on the spread of radioactive substances shortly after the onset of the nuclear crisis.

About an additional 480 residents from some 170 households in the district are expected to join the 117 plaintiffs in the lawsuit.

Police station reopens in Fukushima

October 2, 2015

Police station near Fukushima nuclear plant restarts operations

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/10/02/national/police-station-near-fukushima-nuclear-plant-restarts-operations/#.Vg5XMpfwmic>

JJI

TOMIOKA, FUKUSHIMA PREF. – A police station near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant restarted some operations Thursday.

Futaba Police Station in the Fukushima Prefecture town of Tomioka had been unusable since the March 2011 reactor meltdown at the Tokyo Electric Power Co. plant.

At a reopening ceremony, Katsuhiko Ishida, chief of the Fukushima Prefecture Police, instructed officers to contribute to regional reconstruction by meeting expectations from affected residents.

Officers at the police station should be proud of working on the front line of reconstruction, Ishida said. Futaba Police Station is located in a restricted area where access is allowed only for temporary visits.

It will handle traffic control for a growing number of vehicles serving reconstruction projects, as well as inquiries and registrations from residents who have returned to their homes temporarily.

Two or three officers will be stationed from 9 a.m. through 5 p.m. on Monday to Saturday.

The police station will be used as a hub to patrol the Fukushima towns of Futaba, Okuma and Tomioka.

Operations at Futaba Police Station were relocated to another town in the prefecture soon after the nuclear meltdown. In 2012, a temporary police station opened in Naraha, south of Tomioka.

October 1, 2015

Fukushima police station reopens 4 1/2 years after nuclear meltdowns

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20151001p2a00m0na008000c.html>

TOMIOKA, Fukushima -- A police station that was evacuated in the wake of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster has reopened at its original location, amid the prospects of increased traffic following the lifting of an evacuation order near the area.

The Futaba Police Station of the Fukushima Prefectural Police force resumed part of its operations at its original headquarters in the Fukushima Prefecture town of Tomioka on Oct. 1 -- for the first time in 4 1/2 years since the onset of the nuclear disaster. The headquarters building had been shut down after the area became subject to an evacuation order.

Following the lifting of an evacuation order in the neighboring town of Naraha on Sept. 5, police decided to reopen the original headquarters because of the potential increase in the number of visitors to the area. The headquarters building, however, is still located in a so-called "restricted residential area" -- whose annual accumulated radiation doses measure more than 20 millisieverts and up to 50 millisieverts -- and most of the Futaba Police Station's operations will continue to be carried out at its temporary headquarters in Naraha.

At the reopened headquarters in Tomioka, two to three police officers will be stationed there from Monday through Saturday, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. They will receive consultations from residents who make a temporary return to their homes, as well as being engaged in patrols and traffic control.

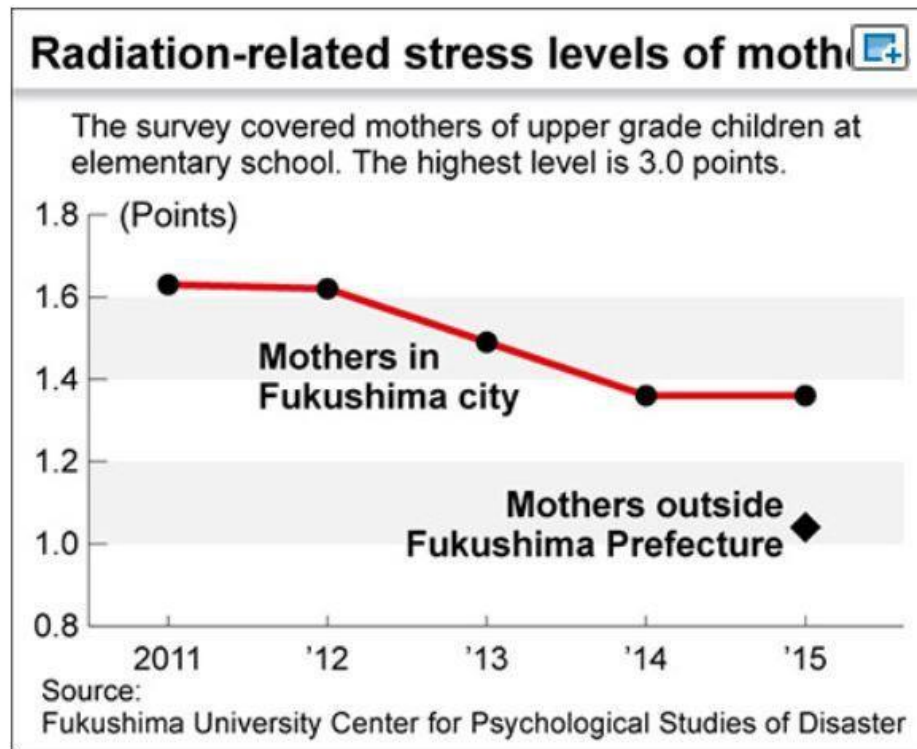
During a ceremony to mark the restart of operations on Oct. 1, prefectural police chief Katsuhiko Ishida told station police officers, "I want you to renew your resolve and assist Fukushima's reconstruction from a security aspect."

Anxiety about radiation everyday stress

October 2, 2015

Study: Radiation-related stress not easing among Fukushima mothers

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201510020006>



The Asahi Shimbun

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

FUKUSHIMA--Psychological stress from the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant has remained around the same level as in 2014 among mothers and children living in Fukushima city, a study found. The stress levels had been dropping since 2011, the year the nuclear disaster started, but apparently bottomed out last year, according to surveys conducted by the Center for Psychological Studies of Disaster at Fukushima University.

“Even after decontamination work is done, the radiation levels remain higher than in pre-accident measurements,” said Yuji Tsutsui, director of the center. “Residents have no choice but to be conscious about radiation in their daily lives, and such anxiety prevents the stress levels from dropping.”

In the latest survey, whose results were released on Sept. 30, mothers with children in kindergarten and elementary school were asked about their and their children’s emotional state.

Mothers who evacuated from no-entry areas around the nuclear plant and residents living in Iwaki and Soma in Fukushima Prefecture were part of the survey for the first time.

Questionnaires were also sent to mothers in Marumori and three other municipalities in southern Miyagi Prefecture, near the Fukushima Prefecture border.

To compare stress levels around the nation, the survey covered mothers in Hyogo Prefecture in western Japan and Kagoshima Prefecture in Kyushu.

The survey yielded 4,733 responses.

The respondents were asked a number of questions, such as if they have flashbacks about the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami that caused the nuclear accident and whether they are easily startled by noises. The researchers quantified the levels of the respondents’ stress on a scale ranging from zero to 3.

The average stress level for mothers in Fukushima city was 1.36, the same as that of 2014. It was 1.63 in 2011.

The stress level for children in Fukushima city was 0.66 this year, down just 0.01 point over 2014. The level was 0.83 in 2011.

Mothers who left areas where evacuation orders have been issued showed the highest stress level, at 1.85. In Soma, the level was 1.48, while it was 1.29 in Iwaki.

In Hyogo and Kagoshima prefectures, the average stress level was 1.06.

An average of 35 percent of the respondents in Kagoshima and Hyogo prefectures said they had felt depressed.

In contrast, 67 percent of nuclear evacuees felt depressed, followed by 55 percent of respondents in Miyagi Prefecture. In Fukushima city, Soma and Iwaki, the “depressed” ratios were 45 percent or higher. “We want to support mothers and children with psychiatric treatment so they can live carefree and positively even with their stress,” Tsutsui said.

In Miyagi Prefecture, the average stress level of mothers with children in the lower grades of elementary school was 1.40. It was 1.42 among mothers with upper-grade children.

On a 2-point scale for anxiety, the levels of mothers in Miyagi Prefecture were 0.47 and 0.53, respectively. Those figures were about the same as those for mothers in Fukushima city.

Hiroko Yoshida, a lecturer at Cyclotron and Radioisotope Center at Tohoku University, has been monitoring airborne radiation levels in the southern areas of Miyagi Prefecture.

“The radiation levels there are no less than those in Soma and Date in northern Fukushima Prefecture,” she said. **“The emotional effect caused by the nuclear plant accident is not an issue only for Fukushima Prefecture.”**

TEPCO officials referred to prosecutors over water pollution

October 2, 2015

TEPCO execs sent to prosecutors over contamination

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Oct. 2, 2015 - Updated 12:26 UTC+2

Fukushima police have referred former and current officials of Tokyo Electric Power Company to prosecutors over the pollution caused by the 2011 nuclear accident at Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

A group of residents filed a criminal complaint 2 years ago against the utility and 32 top officials over the leaks of highly radioactive wastewater from the nuclear plant into the sea.

The group says the company and the executives failed to properly manage storage tanks of contaminated water or build underground walls to block the flow.

Investigators say they have conducted interviews with TEPCO officials and analyzed various materials.

The Fukushima District Prosecutors' Office will determine whether it will lay criminal charges against the company and its officials.

Tokyo Electric Power Company officials declined to make specific comments, but said that they responded to the investigation in an honest manner.

Fukushima police to send toxic water case against TEPCO, execs to prosecutors

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20151002p2a00m0na016000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- Police here will refer Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) and 32 current and former TEPCO executives to prosecutors **in connection with leaks of toxic water into the Pacific** in the aftermath of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, investigative sources say.

The police will send papers on the case to the Fukushima District Public Prosecutors' Office **on suspicion TEPCO and the executives violated the environmental pollution offense law.**

Among the 32 individuals are TEPCO President Naomi Hirose, former Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata and former President Masataka Shimizu. They are suspected of being negligent in their duties and releasing radioactively contaminated water into the ocean from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. An initial criminal complaint accusing TEPCO executives of professional negligence resulting in injury or death was filed jointly by individuals and representatives of a citizens' group. In September 2013, the same complainants filed with the Fukushima police against the TEPCO executives on suspicion of violating the environmental pollution offense law.

The complaint says the central government ordered TEPCO to build underground walls to prevent leaks of contaminated groundwater, but that TEPCO postponed taking the measure, citing costs and other reasons. Furthermore, the complaint accuses TEPCO of using weak water storage tanks resulting in the leak of some 300 metric tons of contaminated water, and of insufficient monitoring measures that led to the delayed discovery of the leak and increasing the volume of water that escaped.

Riding the waves to combat fear

October 4, 2015

Fukushima woman who lost loved ones in 2011 tsunami paddles out to new life as pro surfer

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201510040022>

By YASUO KOJIMA/ Staff Writer

IWAKI, Fukushima Prefecture--Buoyed by memories of her father and grandmother, who died in the 2011 tsunami, a Fukushima woman has overcome her fears of the ocean to ride the waves again as a pro surfer.

Yuka Kitago, 28, won in the competition organized by the Japan Pro Surfing Association in August and qualified to become a pro surfer.

Her family home once stood about 50 meters from the coast of a small bay in Iwaki. In her second year of senior high school, Yuka obtained a second-hand short board and wet suit.

Driven by a strong desire to improve, Yuka practiced surfing even after she became a company employee. She would awake at 4 a.m. and hit the waves for two or three hours before work. Even in the dead of winter, she would often spend as much as five hours in the water.

She read books about surfing and practiced her form on tatami mats. Practicing by watching others, she quickly established a name for herself among amateur surfers.

In 2010, Yuka climbed to third on the points list put out by the Nippon Surfing Association for those between ages 19 and 34 in the short board category.

She practiced almost daily until March 11, 2011.

When the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake struck, the only person at the Kitago home in Iwaki was Yuka's grandmother Sumiko, 72. Normally, Yuka lived at the Iwaki home with her parents and grandparents.

When the quake struck, Yuka's parents were both working at a supermarket in Hirono, Fukushima Prefecture. Yuka's father, Masaaki, 47, used a supermarket vehicle to drive to the Iwaki home to evacuate his mother to higher ground amid the tsunami warning. He was never heard from alive again.

Yuka waited at her workplace in Iwaki. In the evening, she climbed an embankment of the JR Joban Line situated in front of her home. The house had been totally demolished, and the only thing left standing was a large cedar tree in the yard.

The next day, Sumiko's body was recovered from the rubble that had piled up on what used to be the home. Yuka's dirtied wet suit was also found, but all her surfboards were broken.

Because of the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, Yuka temporarily evacuated to a relative's home in Saitama Prefecture with her mother and grandfather after they had cremated Sumiko.

In April 2011, the family returned to a relative's home in Iwaki. On the 49th day after the quake and tsunami, which also marked the final day of searching for the missing by the Self-Defense Forces, a body was found by a cliff about 500 meters from where the family home stood. It was Masaaki, still wearing a jacket labeled with the supermarket name.

Yuka became more fearful of the ocean.

In May, a friend invited her to a coastal area in Ibaraki Prefecture. Borrowing a friend's board, Yuka entered the ocean. When she was wiped out by a wave, Yuka could not help but think of how her grandmother must have suffered. Living as an evacuee, Yuka had put on about seven kilograms. She also was concerned about radiation from the nuclear accident.

She could no longer enjoy surfing as she had once loved.

About a year after the disasters, she met with five or six former classmates from elementary and junior high school. Although they had also suffered from the twin disasters, they all appeared to be enjoying their daily lives again.

Yuka realized she had made her own life a miserable one through her negative thinking.

She decided to start surfing again at Yotsukura beach, her home waters.

In August 2013, she entered the All Japan Surfing Championship held in Kochi Prefecture. The tournament is considered the highest echelon of amateur competition in Japan.

"My father and grandmother will be rewarded if I produce good results," Yuka thought, and she carried photos of the two in her bag.

She could only place second, but that was enough to give her the overall No. 1 ranking for the year. At the championship held in Miyazaki Prefecture the following year, Yuka came out on top for her first title and she again gained the annual No. 1 ranking.

At the trials held by the Japan Pro Surfing Association in Aichi Prefecture in August 2015, Yuka became the first woman from Fukushima Prefecture to qualify as a pro in the short board category. She accomplished the feat on her 28th birthday.

After the competition, Yuka returned to the site where her home once stood. Tiles have been placed at the base of the single cedar tree to serve as a simple altar.

"I have become a pro," Yuka told her father and grandmother.

Although she competed in two events as a pro in September, Yuka did not make it to the finals in either.

"I want to become better," Yuka said. "I also want to enjoy surfing without feeling any kind of pressure from anyone."

Still checking all Fukushima rice

October 5, 2015

Fukushima Pref. to continue testing all rice for radioactive contamination

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20151005p2a00m0na009000c.html>

The Fukushima Prefectural Government plans to continue radiation tests on all bags of rice from the prefecture, on the grounds that consumer confidence has yet to be completely restored due to the ongoing Fukushima nuclear crisis.

The prefectural government began testing all bags of rice produced in the prefecture, starting with rice produced in 2012, a year after the meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. Cases in which radiation levels have exceeded the government safety standard of no more than 100 becquerels per kilogram have decreased each year, with no market-destined rice produced in 2014 being deemed unsafe. Tests on rice produced in 2015 began in August and no results have exceeded the standard this year so far.

At least around 10 million 30-kilogram bags of rice are tested for radiation each year, at a cost of roughly 5 billion yen. Bags whose radiation level is below the government standard receive a "safety sticker" and can be delivered to the market.

According to the prefectural government, 71 bags of rice produced in 2012 exceeded the standard. The following year, the figure fell to 28. In 2014, just two bags produced in an area where measures had not been taken to reduce contamination exceeded the standard. This rice was for home use, not for the market. The steady decline is believed to be a result of progressing measures to reduce contamination, such as spreading potassium over fields to absorb radioactive cesium.

Rice produced in 2011, when the Fukushima nuclear meltdowns occurred, was subjected to sample testing. In October the same year, the prefectural government declared rice in the prefecture "safe," on the grounds that none exceeded the government's provisional safety standard of 500 becquerels per kilogram. Just a month later, however, contamination above this level was found on several occasions, and

the following year the prefecture started testing all rice. A total of 202 testing devices were purchased at a cost of about 4 billion yen and distributed across the prefecture. Over the three years between the 2012 and 2014 fiscal years, the cost of running this equipment, including personnel costs, reached about 15 billion yen.

Takashi Kanno, head of the JA Shin-Fukushima agricultural cooperative, commented, "Looking at data over the past three years, we can probably secure safety through sample testing." However, in a survey of about 600 businesses and consumers within and outside of Fukushima Prefecture in 2013, at least 70 percent of respondents supported testing of all bagged rice.

Photo Journal: Fukushima town preparing rice for market next year

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20151005p2a00m0na002000c.html>



Yukiei Matsumoto, mayor of the Fukushima Prefecture town of Naraha, harvests rice that has been cultivated on an experimental basis to test for radiation contamination, on Oct. 4, 2015. In the background, to his right, stands Yuzutaro, the town's mascot. The evacuation order issued to residents of Naraha after the 2011 onset of the nuclear disaster was lifted about a month ago. Radiation levels in rice grown in Naraha last year and the year before did not exceed standards set by the national government. If radiation levels remain below those standards this year, rice from Naraha is set to make it to the market beginning with next year's harvest. However, because many local farmers fear that consumers will avoid rice from Naraha regardless of the test results, only about 6 percent of farmers who grew rice before the March 2011 triple disasters are expected to plant rice next spring. (Mainichi)

Royal visit in Fukushima

October 9, 2015

Crown Prince and Crown Princess visit Fukushima high school, tomato farm

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20151009p2a00m0na022000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- Crown Prince Naruhito and Crown Princess Masako visited a high school and a tomato farm in Fukushima Prefecture on Oct. 8, as the area still struggles from the aftermath of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant disaster.

At the Futaba Future School in the town of Hirono, which was inaugurated this past spring, a student who lives in a school dormitory after he was forced from his home due to the nuclear disaster, told the couple, "I want to become a doctor in the future so that I can return the favor to my hometown." In response, the Crown Prince said, "It is too bad you cannot return to your hometown."

The couple also visited Tomato Land Iwaki, an agricultural corporation in the city of Iwaki, the same day. The farm has conducted voluntary tests on its products for radioactive materials.

Enough power for winter

October 10, 2015

Enough power to go around this winter

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201510100034

By TOSHIO KAWADA/ Staff Writer

The government is confident there is a sufficient electricity supply to heat homes and offices this winter and will not call on households and businesses to conserve energy.

It said forecasts show that there will be enough supply even on the coldest of days when demand will peak.

Forecasts on supply and demand of electricity this winter were compiled by nine electric utility companies and released by the industry ministry's Electricity Supply-Demand Verification Subcommittee on Oct. 9.

The nine companies include all Japanese regional electric utility monopolies, except Okinawa Electric Power Co.

According to the report, all nine firms have secured sufficient power to maintain electricity within a 3-percent margin.

Because of this, the government decided there is no need to set a specific goal on energy conservation by homes and offices.

Kyushu Electric Power Co. said it will be generating more electricity this winter with the restart in August of the No. 1 reactor of its Sendai nuclear power plant in Satsuma-Sendai, Kagoshima Prefecture.

It was the first nuclear power plant to come back online after all nuclear power plants were shut down in the aftermath of the 2011 nuclear disaster in Fukushima Prefecture.

The utility had expected to take advantage of a power pool from another utility last winter, but was able to maintain a 3-percent capability margin without having to do so. The figure is estimated to improve to 4.7 percent this winter.

Hokkaido Electric Power Co.'s supply capabilities are also expected to improve this winter and, like the last one, will not be imposing restrictions on electricity consumption to households and businesses. Whether or not nuclear power plants under Kansai Electric Power Co. will be restarting anytime soon remains unclear, but nevertheless, the utility said it will be able to maintain a 3.3-percent capability margin this winter.

The nine utilities had projected that demand this past summer would total 162.6 million kilowatts. However, actual demand fell short by 8.06 million kilowatts.

This was most likely due to **conservation practices becoming more commonplace than the utilities had initially thought, along with a shift toward alternative energy sources, including household power generation and the utilization of surplus power from factories.** Low temperatures experienced by western and central Japan also played a role in falling demand for power over the hottest months of the year.

Safety "fully vouched for"

October 12, 2015

Safety of Fukushima-produced foods emphasized at Milan expo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/10/12/national/safety-fukushima-produced-foods-emphasized-milan-expo/#.VhvMAivwmot>

Kyodo

MILAN – A campaign began at the Japan Pavilion of the food-themed world expo in Italy on Sunday to demonstrate to visitors that food from Fukushima Prefecture is safe despite a nuclear disaster there in 2011.

During the four-day campaign which ends Wednesday, samples of local foods, such as fruits and Japanese sake, are being offered to highlight the quality control efforts producers have been making since the disaster.

At the pavilion, Norio Hashimoto, an official of the Fukushima Prefectural Government, said the quality of fruits shipped from the prefecture is “fully vouched for.” He added, “Fukushima is one of the major producers of fruits in the country.”

His colleague, Takeshi Fujita, said the purpose of the campaign is to convey “correct information” about Fukushima foods, but stressed that he does not intend to force it on anyone.

The campaign is also aimed at conveying how far rebuilding has proceeded since the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant suffered meltdowns in tsunami triggered by a powerful earthquake on March 11, 2011.

A 59-year-old visitor said he enjoyed the dried peaches and sake that were served at the event, expressing hope that safety is pursued “sincerely” on matters of food.

Some visitors had the chance to experience Fukushima folklore in which dumplings are skewered on tree branches to wish for a good harvest.

TEPCO faces multiple official compensation claims

October 12, 2015

TEPCO facing compensation demands from dozens of local gov'ts over nuclear disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20151012p2a00m0na006000c.html>

Seventeen prefectures including Fukushima Prefecture and seven major cities have filed compensation claims totaling 56.36 billion yen against Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), citing damage caused by the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant in 2011, the Mainichi Shimbun has learned. TEPCO has refused to pay over 20 billion yen of the claimed amount, and six prefectures and one ordinance-designated city either plan or already have filed for nuclear damage compensation under the **alternative dispute resolution (ADR) system**.

Development of a compensation system for such entities has been slow compared with individual residents or companies. An official from one of the municipalities says the national government needs to get involved with concrete measures.

The Mainichi Shimbun surveyed all 47 prefectures, including Tokyo, as well as the nation's ordinance-designated cities, over the amount and details of compensation they were demanding from TEPCO as of the end of August this year. All prefectures and ordinance-designated cities in the Kanto and Tohoku regions have filed for damages. Mie and Shimane prefectures in the west of Honshu Island have also asked the utility to pay for dosimeters and other devices that the prefectural governments purchased in the wake of the nuclear disaster.

According to sources related to prefectural and municipal governments, TEPCO has agreed to pay a total of 36.29 billion yen in compensation for the drop in revenues of public businesses such as those managing water and sewage systems, the cost of radiation tests on school meals and agricultural and livestock products, and the cost of processing and storing waste contaminated with radioactive substances, among other damage.

In some cases, however, TEPCO fixed the period for damage caused by the nuclear disaster. In addition, the utility has not agreed to cover the drop in residence tax and other tax revenues in Fukushima Prefecture, caused by many moving out the prefecture due to the disaster, or the cost of measures to curb harmful rumors regarding radioactive contamination in Akita Prefecture and the cost of extending assistance to nuclear disaster victims in Gunma Prefecture.

Dissatisfied with TEPCO's handling of the situation, the Aomori, Akita, Yamagata, Miyagi and Chiba prefectural governments have filed claims for damage via the ADR system. Gunma Prefecture and the city of Sendai are set to follow suit. The Iwate Prefectural Government has already reached a 250 million yen settlement with TEPCO.

According to Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures -- the three areas hit hardest by the 2011 triple disaster -- most municipalities have filed for compensation from TEPCO, with the total amount claimed reaching 62.88 billion yen. Of that, the utility has agreed to pay only 8.65 billion yen. In addition, some municipalities in other prefectures have also demanded that TEPCO pay compensation for damages. In total, prefectural and municipal governments across the country are reportedly seeking over 120 billion yen in damages from the utility.

A TEPCO official told the Mainichi Shimbun, "We are paying local governments compensation in amounts that fall within a necessary and logical range based on interim guidelines set by the Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation."

"Snow Drop" to raise awareness about evacuees

October 13, 2015

Fukushima evacuee group to sell handmade items at Tokyo awareness event

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20151013p2a00m0na016000c.html>

A group of evacuees from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant disaster are hoping to raise awareness about the realities nuclear evacuees face by opening a one-day store selling handmade goods in Tokyo next week.

The group, called Snow Drop, was established to support self-reliance among voluntary evacuees from Fukushima Prefecture and has sold handmade items at events and lectures. The group is now busy preparing for a stall to open at an event to be held at Kiba Park in Koto Ward on Oct. 24.

"We would like to create an opportunity to raise awareness about the realities faced by voluntary evacuees and Fukushima Prefecture, if only a little," said a representative of the group. According to the group, there is a strong desire among nuclear evacuees to produce something on their own instead of just receiving support from others.

Kazuko Nihei, 39, a core member of the group who works as a temp staffer, evacuated from the city of Fukushima to Tokyo's Nerima Ward along with her two daughters. "We can stay positive if items we produce using our skills receive favorable feedback and generate even a little profit," Nihei said. The items produced by the group include coasters, straps, wallets and accessories using "Aizu Momen" cotton -- a specialty of Fukushima's Aizu region -- and other materials.

Even 4 1/2 years after the Fukushima meltdowns, there are many voluntary evacuees who are forced to lead a "dual life" -- where husbands remain in Fukushima to work and their wives and children live outside the prefecture as evacuees. Such living conditions sometimes result in divorces and fatherless families. An increase in living and transportation costs, as well as a drop in salaries due to job transfers, are taking a heavy toll on evacuees.

The group -- originally established in November 2012 by a group of mothers who evacuated from outside government-designated evacuation areas in Fukushima -- currently has around five members, who live in Tokyo, Ibaraki, Kanagawa and other prefectures. As the members are busy with work and child-rearing, they can hardly get together. "I once thought about suspending our activities," Nihei said, but decided to keep doing them to maintain bonding among evacuees in a society where she feels their presence is fading from people's memories.

For more information, visit the group's website at: <https://www.facebook.com/snwdrp>

Symbol of reconstruction efforts dismantled

October 15, 2015

3-km conveyor belt taken out of rotation in 3/11 disaster area

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201510150038>

By KAZUMASA SUGIMURA/ Staff Writer

RIKUZENTAKATA, Iwate Prefecture--A 20-meter-high conveyor belt that extends 3 kilometers over this tsunami-hit city is being dismantled after moving about 5.04 million square meters of soil for reconstruction work.

Work to tear down the huge apparatus started on Oct. 14 and is scheduled to be completed by next autumn.

The conveyor belt, commissioned by the city government and built by a joint venture that included general contractor Shimizu Corp., started operating in March 2014, about three years after the March 11 tsunami slammed into Rikuzentakata and destroyed much of the city.

The machine transported soil from the mountains to residential areas to elevate the land for protection against future tsunami. It completed its task in September.

A fleet of 10-ton trucks would have needed an estimated nine years to complete the same job.

The giant conveyor belt became a symbol of the region's reconstruction efforts and drew curious onlookers to the city.

Animals left in Fukushima

October 14, 2015

Forgotten animals of Fukushima at risk as winter looms

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2015/10/14/how-tos/forgotten-animals-fukushima-risk-winter-looms/#.Vh9fUSvwmos>

by Louise George Kittaka

Special To The Japan Times

Tohoku is already gearing up for winter, and the colder weather is particularly harsh for the animals left behind in Fukushima when their owners evacuated the area after the nuclear disaster of 2011. Foreign animal volunteer Miwa Wang has been helping at the Fukkou-no-ie (House of Hope), a facility set up in Iitate village in 2014 by Miyoshi Hirayama to care for dogs unable to evacuate with their owners. Around two dozen dogs currently reside at the shelter, but many more have been left behind at their homes. Volunteers also care for the single farm animal now left in the village, a pig called Kuro-*chan*. Wang says there are several reasons behind this sad situation. "No evacuation facilities and/or temporary housing were designed to accommodate pets in Fukushima at the time of the disaster," she says. "Although two cities in Fukushima are now providing pet-friendly housing, nothing changed for evacuees in other areas."

She notes that since **animals are viewed as objects in the eyes of the law**, even when a pet owner is clearly violating animal protection laws, they generally maintain the right to treat the animal as they wish.

According to a local government survey, 90 percent of the owners have no intention of returning to their old house to live, yet they will not relinquish their dogs and allow them the chance of finding a new home.

"Some owners want their dogs to guard empty homes; some want their dogs to be at their empty home for emotional security — 'I have something to look forward to when I return'; a few are shy about asking others to help; some have no choice but to leave their beloved animals alone in the cold or heat for years," Wang says.

For more information on the shelter's activities or to make a donation, visit the Facebook page at www.facebook.com/hukkounoie. Volunteers are also very welcome.

Your questions and comments: lifelines@japantimes.co.jp

Rice harvested by evacuees to check radiation levels

October 17, 2015

Evacuees of disaster-hit village harvest rice to measure contamination

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201510170055>



Muneo Kanno, left front, and members of a local group and volunteers harvest a rice crop to measure its radioactive contamination in Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture, on Oct. 3. (Sayuri Ide)

By SAYURI IDE/ Staff Writer

IITATE, Fukushima Prefecture--Former residents of this village evacuated after the 2011 nuclear disaster returned to harvest rice, not to eat, but to glean data on levels of radioactivity.

By gathering reliable data on radioactive pollution in the rice plants, the villagers hope it will prove to be a vital step in a future decision to return for good.

The village located northwest of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant was evacuated in the aftermath of the 2011 triple meltdown at the Fukushima facility triggered by the earthquake and tsunami disaster.

The villagers, joined by volunteers from the Tokyo metropolitan area, formed the nonprofit group "Fukushima Saisei no Kai" (Resurrection of Fukushima) to raise the crop from 2012 to monitor the radioactivity in various rice types, including brown rice, polished rice, rice bran and rice straw.

The residents of Iitate are barred from returning home to live due to high radiation levels.

"Our feelings toward the local community will be shared by others when we join in (this project) together," said Muneo Kanno, a 64-year-old Iitate evacuee who co-founded the group and participated in the Oct. 3 harvest, the fourth since the project first got under way.

The rice paddies were inundated with torrential rains in September. There were also downpours in nearby forests that have not been decontaminated.

"We will accumulate data on the consequences (of the heavy rains) and pass them down to the next generation," Kanno said.

Nuclear watch: Concerns over Restarts

October 16, 2015

Concerns over Nuclear Restarts

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclearwatch/20151016.html>

Tomoko Kamata

Another reactor at a nuclear power plant in southwestern Japan is back online. This is the second restart under new regulations adopted after the 2011 Fukushima accident. The plant operators are preparing to restart 3 more reactors.

But many nearby residents say they need more information.

The No. 2 reactor at the Sendai nuclear power plant went back online on Thursday. The No. 1 reactor at the plant was restarted in August. Until then, all of Japan's nuclear reactors had been offline since September 2013.

Two reactors at the Takahama plant and one at the Ikata plant have now been declared in compliance with the new regulations.

The operators of the Takahama plant want to go back online by January. But a court decision is blocking their way.

The Ikata plant is undergoing checks by regulators. Meanwhile, power companies have applied for regulatory approval for another 20 reactors.

Government officials say restarting Japan's nuclear plants will ensure a stable power supply and lower greenhouse gas emissions. And plant operators say the cost of fuel at thermal plants is extremely burdensome.

Isamu Matsumiya lives in the town of Takahama. He accepts that restarting the reactors is necessary. But he's unhappy with how the local government is handling the issue.

He said town officials broadcast information about safety measures on television, six times a day. But there have been no face-to-face meetings with residents.

Matsumiya responded to a questionnaire. He asked how radioactive water will be kept from seeping out in the event of disaster. He received a reply saying only that the government "is working on it."

"The officials don't understand how we feel when we ask such questions," said Matsumiya. "I'm disappointed this is how they respond to residents."

Some other residents pointed out problems with the town's evacuation plans. Most are expected to use a coastal road.

But town officials predict the route will be inundated if a tsunami hits the area.

Experts also indicate many evacuees will end up getting stuck in traffic.

Takanobu Sugimoto, Cabinet Office Director for Nuclear Emergency Preparedness, says, "The office is doing its best to support and coordinate with local officials to respond appropriately should an emergency occur."

An NHK survey conducted last weekend asked people how they feel about restarting the reactors.

Eighteen percent of respondents said they support bringing the plants back online, while 43 percent are opposed.

Experts say the government must demonstrate how it plans to protect public safety, if it wants to gain support.

Skating ring in Kawamata will reopen

October 18, 2015

Fukushima skating rink to reopen in anticipation of residents' return

Fukushima Minpo

A well-known skating rink in Kawamata, Fukushima Prefecture, that closed after the triple core meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant in 2011 will reopen in January, giving a shot in the arm to the disaster-stricken area.

The open-air rink in the Yamakiya district was evacuated to protect residents from the radiation spewed out by the ruined atomic plant. In August 2013, however, the majority of the district was redesignated as ready to have the evacuation order lifted.

Since that might happen as early as next spring, the Kawamata Skating Club announced on Oct. 7 that it was finally planning to reopen the rink in January.

Using a ¥10 million subsidy from the Small and Medium Enterprise Agency, the club will develop the 150-meter course Kinuno Sato Yamakiya Tanbo Rink on the same idle *tanbo* (rice paddy) it stood on before. It also will build a clubhouse stocked with 50 pairs of new ice skates.

"We want to carry over the 'Tanbo Rink' to the next generation," said club Chairman Toichi Kanno. Kanno and Hidekazu Ouchi, the vice chairman, visited the site on Oct. 7.

The Environment Ministry finished its decontamination work in Yamakiya this year. The club has determined the rink will be safe when it reopens in January, pointing out **the ice will block some of the radiation.**

The rink will be made naturally from water sprinkled on the rice paddy and be open from mid-January to early February. Skaters will be able to use it from early morning till about 10 a.m., free of charge, the club said.

Olympic speed skating champion Hiroyasu Shimizu, who won gold in the 500-meter even in Nagano in 1998, will be invited to give lessons in late January, it said.

The Fukushima Skating Federation also plans to hold a competition in Yamakiya.

"The skating population fell sharply after the close of the Tanbo Rink," said Eiju Sato, chairman of the federation. "We hope (reopening it) will help the development of speed skating" in Fukushima Prefecture, he said.

The Kawamata Skating Club opened the rink on the rice paddy in 1984 as a project to revitalize the Yamakiya district. The last time it was open was in February 2011.

About 1,500 people used the rink each winter, and about 300 local elementary and junior high school students had joined the club.

This section, appearing every third Monday, features topics and issues covered by the Fukushima Minpo, the largest newspaper in Fukushima Prefecture. The original article was published on Oct. 8.

Abe visits Fukushima

October 19, 2015

Abe visits former evacuated town in Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20151019_29.html

Oct. 19, 2015 - Updated 11:27 UTC+2

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has renewed his pledge to oversee the reconstruction of areas hit by the 2011 nuclear accident in northeastern Japan.

Abe visited the Fukushima Prefecture town of Naraha on Monday. The town's evacuation order was lifted in September.

Most of the residents fled their homes following the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant four years ago.

Townpeople meeting with Abe asked for his help in rebuilding their lives and restoring local industries.

Abe said it's important that the people return to live in the town and take up their occupations again. He said the government will do all it can to help them accomplish both goals.

Abe also spoke at the **opening ceremony of a facility in the town for testing robots that will be used to decommission the crippled nuclear reactors.**

He said within a few years the facility will host both researchers from Japan and abroad developing cutting-edge decommissioning technologies.

He said the government will join hands with locals to accelerate reconstruction of disaster-hit areas.

Salmon fishing resumes in Fukushima

October 19, 2015

Salmon fishing returns to Fukushima after 5-year absence

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201510190032

By AKIFUMI NAGAHASHI/ Staff Writer

NARAHARA, Fukushima Prefecture--Traditional salmon "combination net fishing" returned to the Kidogawa river here for the first time in five years as fishermen hauled in about 120 of the cold-water fish. With the evacuation order for Naraha lifted in September, members of the local fisheries cooperative association gathered around 11:30 a.m. on Oct. 18 to drive salmon from the upper reaches of the Kidogawa with a net toward another one set up downstream. It was the first time the fishing operations took place since the nuclear disaster at the nearby Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, which was caused by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. Most of Naraha is located within the 20-kilometer-radius evacuation zone surrounding the stricken plant, but the evacuation order was lifted for the entire town on Sept. 5. According to the association, some of the fish caught were salmon fry that were released into the Kidogawa in early March 2011 before the disaster, which had returned to the river as adults to spawn. Authorities gave the green light to shipping Kidogawa river salmon after a survey conducted by the Fukushima prefectural government found that levels of radioactive materials detected in the fish were below the central government's safety standard of 100 becquerels per kilogram.

October 19, 2015

Photo Journal: Salmon fishing resumes in disaster-hit Fukushima town

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20151019p2a00m0na004000c.html>



Salmon are caught in nets in the Kido River in Naraha, Fukushima Prefecture, on Oct. 18, 2015 -- the first time in five years for salmon fishing to resume in the area following the outbreak of the disaster at Tokyo

Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. Fishermen created a weir across the river and formed a line to drive salmon about 200 meters downstream and net them. The area was one of the biggest producers of the fish on Honshu island before the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami that triggered the nuclear disaster, with some 15 million fry released each year, but hatcheries suffered major damage in the 2011 tsunami. The prefectural government began monitoring the fish three years ago, and no radioactive materials have been detected in the fish. The salmon will go on the market for the first time since the disaster. (Mainichi)

Salmon fishing resumes in Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20151019_10.html

Oct. 19, 2015 - Updated 02:10 UTC+2

Fishermen in Fukushima have resumed catching salmon in a river for the first time since the 2011 nuclear disaster in the prefecture.

Salmon fishing in the Kido River, which runs through Naraha town, had been suspended because the area was designated an evacuation zone.

But fishermen decided to resume fishing after the evacuation order was lifted on September 5th, and tests on salmon that had returned to the river found them free of radioactive substances.

Town officials and people from a local fishery cooperative joined a ceremony on Sunday to pray for safe fishing. They also celebrated the completion of a processing plant that was destroyed by the tsunami.

Fishermen then went out on the river and hauled up nets.

The head of the fishing cooperative, Hideo Matsumoto, said he's relieved to restart catching salmon. He said he wants town residents to enjoy eating the fish.

Mayor Yukiei Matsumoto said he's pleased with the revival of salmon fishing because it's a key resource for tourism in his town. He said it will invigorate the community and contribute to the local recovery.

The fishery cooperative plans to start test-marketing processed salmon this year. It will also release young salmon into the river next spring.

The taste of Fukushima peaches...

October 17, 2015

Foreign visitors to Fukushima send positive messages back to rest of the world

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201510170027

By NATSUKI EDOGAWA/ Staff Writer

FUKUSHIMA--In Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture, where radiation levels remain high from the nuclear accident, a radiation detector's piercing beep was heard, which echoed over the mountain village.

Radioactivity readings were 0.8 microsievert per hour--the day's highest.

Alexander Klenberger, 26, an Austrian language teacher and journalist, said it would still be difficult to live here.

"But (Iitate) is not Chernobyl," he said. "We can see flowers growing. Houses are being taken care of. I feel this village is alive."

Foreign visitors have returned and are on the increase in Fukushima Prefecture more than four years after the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant accident.

Unlike some videos posted on the Internet that made light of the accident, visitors such as Klenberger are viewing Fukushima in a positive manner.

He traveled to Fukushima Prefecture to record the aftermath of the nuclear accident in August. Klenberger has covered the aftermath of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, and also offers language instruction to refugees from Syria and Afghanistan at home.

He took dozens of photos in the Odaka district in Minami-Soma, within the 20-kilometer zone from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 plant where the evacuation advisory has yet to be lifted.

Klenberger took shots of collapsed houses and bicycles lined up in the parking lot in front of JR Odaka Station.

"Sad," he repeatedly murmured.

There was a moment, however, when Klenberger flashed a radiant smile--when he saw a lone pine tree that withstood the 2011 tsunami in the city's Kashima district.

He recalled one symbolic tree in Chernobyl, which fell down after all local residents were gone.

Klenberger is hopeful about the future of the "miracle" pine tree that survived the tsunami.

"It is difficult to imagine how it was like in the area before the earthquake and tsunami," he said.

But he believes the pine tree will eventually draw locals back, he added.

It is rare to see news about Fukushima in his country, as Austrians are not interested in happenings in "a faraway country," Klenberger said.

However, his story ideas on Chernobyl have been occasionally been picked up by local radio stations and newspapers.

He hopes the same will happen to his Fukushima stories as Japan will soon mark the fifth anniversary of the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster in March 2016.

TASTE OF PEACHES

"I have never heard of such a sweet peach," an Italian university student posted on Twitter.

The prefecture invited 10 university students from Milan in July to visit.

The students had been eager to taste peaches grown in the prefecture.

The tour included a visit to a peach farm in Fukushima, a lecture on the difficulties of decontamination work and inspection of radiation testing of agricultural products.

Lapertosa Giorgia, a senior Japanese language student, said she had been curious why farmers kept growing peaches in this radiation-affected area.

"Why do they continue growing the fruit here, which has been hit hard by rumors?" she had thought.

But now she received her answer, she said.

When she bit into a peach, she found that its taste differed greatly from its Italian counterpart.

Even though the fruit felt hard when she held it in her hand, it tasted incredibly sweet.

"Perhaps the taste is created in this special place," she said.

In an effort to boost tourism, Fukushima Prefecture is promoting a project to invite bloggers whose sites receive large numbers of views.

In April, the prefecture invited three bloggers from Taiwan.

In Taiwan, many people are said to choose their travel destinations by looking at blogs.

The guests visited the Aizu district during their four-day visit, occasionally posting on their blogs.

One blogger liked the ramen in Kitakata, where many ramen shops are concentrated.

"This is original Japanese ramen," the blogger posted. "You should definitely visit once and try."

Another blogger wrote about the area of the old Ouchijuku post station of the Edo Period (1603-1867), "I was greatly impressed."

A prefecture official said, "An individual visitor's postings could remove and change anxieties about (radiation in) Fukushima."

Machu Pichu-Fukushima friendship

October 28, 2015

Machu Picchu inks friendship pact with Fukushima village of Otama

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/10/28/national/machu-picchu-inks-friendship-pact-fukushima-village-otama/#.VjCmait1Cot>





Kyodo

FUKUSHIMA – Machu Picchu, a World Heritage site in Peru, has been paired with Otama, a village in Fukushima Prefecture, in the first instance of the Inca citadel signing such an agreement.

The two municipalities held a signing ceremony at the site Monday, with the attendance of Toshikazu Oshiyama, head of Otama, and Machu Picchu Mayor Delman David Gayoso Garcia, along with residents of the two villages.

Machu Picchu has been receiving requests from municipalities around the world to sign friendship agreements, but chose Otama in honor of Yokichi Nouchi (1895-1969), who emigrated from Otama to Peru in the early 20th century and contributed to the development of tourism in Machu Picchu.

Otama hopes to promote itself by producing Peruvian agricultural items and offering educational exchange programs.

Machu Picchu is a historic sanctuary located more than 2,400 meters above sea level northwest of Cuzco, which served as the capital of the Inca Empire in the 15th and 16th century. It is popular among tourists for its dramatic mountain landscape.

Only 14% of evacuees planning to go home

October 28, 2015

Less than 15 percent of evacuees want to return to Fukushima homes

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201510280056>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

An increasing number of evacuees are reluctant to return home in two municipalities that became ghost towns four-and-a-half years ago following the disaster at the nearby Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, a survey showed.

When asked if they would return to their homes once the evacuation order on the towns was lifted, 50.8 percent of households in the town of Tomioka and 63.5 percent of households in Okuma said “no” in the survey.

Compared with a survey last year, that is a 1.4 percentage point increase for Tomioka and a 5.6 percentage point rise for Okuma.

Some 13.9 percent of households in Tomioka, up 2.0 percentage points, and 11.4 percent of Okuma households, down 1.9 percentage points, said “yes” to the question.

The percentage of households that were undecided was 29.4 percent in Tomioka, a 1.3 percentage point decrease, and 17.3 percent for Okuma, down 8.6 percentage points.

In August, all households from the two towns in Fukushima Prefecture were sent the surveys in a joint study conducted by the Reconstruction Agency, the Fukushima prefectural government and the two municipal governments.

The response rates were 51.4 percent for Tomioka and 50 percent for Okuma.

The central government is doing everything it can to encourage evacuees to return home, including lifting evacuation orders in some areas and establishing deadlines for receiving compensation for damages caused by the nuclear disaster.

Exhibit on Fukushima animals

October 29, 2015

Photo exhibit profiles lives of animals in Fukushima nuclear no-go zone

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/features/news/20151029p2a00m0na012000c.html>

Once domesticated animals such as pigs and cows still roam free in the no-go zone along the coast near the disaster-stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, and an upcoming photo exhibit will offer visitors a glimpse of these animals' lives without their human masters.

The photos -- on display Oct. 31 and Nov. 1 at Nippon Veterinary and Life Science University in Musashino, Tokyo -- were snapped by Kumiko Otani, a member of a veterinarians' and farmers' group that cares for and does research on cows in the nuclear accident evacuation zone. Otani, who works for a Tokyo advertising agency, has been helping care for animals in the zone and doing other support work since just after the reactor meltdowns in March 2011, taking photos all the while.

The 26 images include the skeletons of cows left in their paddocks and pigs wandering through deserted residential neighborhoods, each photo reminding the viewer of the nuclear accident's harsh realities.

"I share the frustrations of the farmers, and want to continue to participate in the research being done" in the evacuation zone, Otani commented.

The exhibition will be open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on both days, and admission is free.

First salmon fishing since 3/11

October 31, 2015

1st salmon fishing since 2011 nuclear accident

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Oct. 31, 2015 - Updated 06:31 UTC+1

Anglers at a river in Fukushima Prefecture have enjoyed their first session of salmon fishing since the nuclear meltdowns in 2011.

About 30 sports anglers and local fishermen gathered on Saturday morning at the Kido River, which runs through Naraha Town. The site is south of the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

They cast their lines as a siren sounded at 7AM. They caught salmon about 70 centimeters long.

It was the first salmon fishing by rod in the area in nearly 5 years.

A man in his 60s, who landed a fish of more than 4 kilograms, said he is happy to return to salmon fishing at the river.

Kentaro Suzuki, who runs a local hatchery, said that he was thrilled to see anglers enjoying the fishing, although there are fewer fish than before.

Shoppers also returned to the fish store at a nearby processing plant.

An elderly woman who fled the town after the meltdowns, said she was pleased to hear the store had reopened. She said she used to send local fish every year to her son who lived away from home.

Commercial salmon fishing in the Kido River resumed earlier this month, following the lifting of the evacuation order for Naraha in September.

First national association of voluntary evacuees

October 30, 2015

'Voluntary evacuees' from Fukushima disaster seek extended assistance period

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201510300078>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

So-called voluntary evacuees from the Fukushima nuclear disaster set up their first national association to call for the continuation of provisional housing and financial assistance.

About 130 people, including supporters, gathered in Tokyo on Oct. 29 to set up the national evacuees association. Some had lived in areas of Fukushima Prefecture around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. Others fled their homes in other prefectures after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami hit the plant on March 11, 2011, out of fears of radioactive fallout.

The government plans to lift all evacuation orders around the plant by the end of March 2017, except for certain areas where radiation levels are expected to remain high. People who do not return to their homes in areas that the government says are safe are called "voluntary evacuees."

"There is a risk even if radiation levels become lower," said Seiichi Nakate, a 54-year-old nursing-care worker and a representative of the organization. "Especially, voluntary evacuees, who receive smaller support, are being forced to choose between living in poverty and returning to their hometowns with low radiation levels."

The Fukushima prefectural government plans to terminate free housing for voluntary evacuees by the end of March 2017.

Kaori Kawai, who fled to Saitama Prefecture from Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, said she is frequently asked by her two children if they have to relocate or attend a different school. The family currently lives on welfare, although she said she has been trying hard to become independent.

News that the government will terminate housing assistance came as a shock.

"We chose to evacuate just to protect children," she said.

Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the Fukushima plant, also plans to end compensation payments in March 2018.

The newly formed group, in cooperation with evacuees from areas where evacuation orders were issued, plans to ask the central and local governments as well as TEPCO to extend the period of providing housing and other assistance measures.

Okuma to become reconstruction hub

November 5, 2015

Disaster-hit Fukushima town to design reconstruction hub

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20151105p2a00m0na021000c.html>

The town of Okuma in Fukushima Prefecture, which houses the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant and where the majority of residential areas have been designated as "difficult-to-return zones," is designing a new sub-town in the form of a reconstruction hub, which will be located in residential zones with comparatively low radiation levels.

It is envisioned that the new zone will encompass a total area of around 40 hectares -- around 0.5 percent of the town as a whole -- and will house some 3,000 residents.

広告

The Okuma town mayoral race, during which the need for the new residential area should by all accounts be raised as an issue to be questioned, was announced on Nov. 5. There are no likely candidates, however, other than sitting incumbent Toshitsuna Watanabe.

Even Watanabe himself has said, "I had actually hoped to retire and pass along the job to someone younger" -- a statement belying his true feelings, which only goes to show how fraught with difficulties the road ahead truly is.

"I plan to take on the task of implementing local development so that residents can feel their hometown is moving toward recovery one step at a time," commented Watanabe, 68, who is seeking a third term in office, in his first campaign speech on the morning of Nov. 5 in the Fukushima prefectural city of Aizuwakamatsu, which is located some 100 kilometers west of Okuma.

A temporary building for the Okuma town government has been set up in Aizuwakamatsu, where around 1,500 Okuma residents are additionally living in temporary housing facilities.

Okuma's population stood at 10,778 as of the end of October, with 23 percent of the town's residents having evacuated outside of Fukushima Prefecture -- mostly within the Kanto region.

The designated "difficult-to-return zones" -- whose prospects for residents ever being able to go back are unclear -- comprise some 62 percent of the town's total area, and around 96 percent of its residential districts.

In September of last year, the town agreed to be one of the locations to host temporary storage for radioactively contaminated soil and other materials resulting from radiation decontamination work -- with the area targeted for the facility covering around one-third of the town's residential area.

Even so, some residents -- the majority of them elderly individuals -- insist that they wish to return to Okuma. It was within this context that the town government announced plans in March of this year to construct the new, smaller town in Okuma's residential Ogawara district, which is designated as a restricted residence area where decontamination work has been carried out for residents to return within a few years.

New facilities are targeted to be built within an agricultural area of around 40 hectares in the new zone, including office buildings and research centers for the nuclear reactor decommissioning projects, as well as disaster recovery public housing for local residents.

The plan envisages around 2,000 reactor decommissioning workers living in the area in three years' time, along with some 1,000 Okuma locals, mainly elderly residents, returning to the town.

While the town government had at one time considered constructing a local elderly care facility, this plan was rejected due to the likelihood that not enough employees could be recruited to work there.

In addition, the town has no plans to rebuild elementary or junior high schools, with few parents bringing their children back to live in the town due to fears regarding the effects of radiation.

"Those who return here will likely be elderly individuals living on their own," commented a high-ranking town official. "For such people who have the desire to live here, we wanted to give them hope."

Watanabe began telling others last autumn that he planned to retire as mayor, saying that his "back pain makes it difficult to work."

Every town assembly member that he approached as a possible successor, however, declined -- citing the numerous problems with local administration that made the job appear too daunting. Eventually, Watanabe was convinced to change his mind about retiring.

When he announced his candidacy at the beginning of October, with less than one month left before the deadline to do so, he let slip the comment that "things really aren't seeming to go my way."

A man in his 60s who is living in temporary housing in Aizuwakamatsu said, "Plans need to be put into place so that people who wish to return home may do so."

He added apprehensively, however, "I wonder if a town that has no children and only elderly residents can actually work."

Hisa Iwami

November 7, 2015

INSIGHT: Fukushima disaster keeps 100,000 from descending on 'sweet home'

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/column/AJ201511070008>



A monument inscribed with a poem written by Hisa Iwami, under her pen name, Hisako, stands by the side of a folk heritage museum in Tanohata, Iwate Prefecture. (Toshihide Ueda)

By TOSHIHIDE UEDA/ Senior Staff Writer

TANOHATA, Iwate Prefecture--Anti-nuclear campaigner Hisa Iwami, who worked as a public health nurse in this northeastern village, died on Sept. 19. She was 97.

I returned to the village recently to mourn for her.

As I wrote in an earlier column about Iwami, a proposal came out of the blue more than 30 years ago to build a nuclear power plant in this village. Women in Tanohata became united under Iwami to fight the project. No nuclear plant was built there.

Iwami was lying in bed when I last met her in July. She was no longer able to move her body at will, but she spoke in a firm tone when she said, "Perhaps I didn't come to Tanohata in vain because I blocked the plan to build a nuclear plant."

A folk heritage museum of the village government stands near Hofukuji temple, where Iwami spent more than half a century of her life. The museum shows the history of Sanhei Ikki, a peasant uprising that originated twice from here during the late Edo Period (1603-1867). By the side of the museum stand statues of two villagers who led the uprising, along with a monument inscribed with a poem written by Iwami.

"There is no sweet home for me but here/ I say to myself/ The air is clear/ With no trace of dust"

She wrote the poem when she first visited Tanohata in the early postwar period. A nuclear plant was probably something that would have soiled her "sweet home." By the side of the statues of the two leaders of Sanhei Ikki, the monument to the poem preserves the memory of the "third uprising" that took place here again.

Looking up, I found the sky perfectly clear and blue. That was the "authentic sky," the beauty of which Iwami said held her spellbound.

'SHIELD' FOR PRESERVING LIVES

Iwami's actions must have been driven by a desire to preserve all lives that have been born into this world.

She showered her only son with all her love after her first husband died of an illness. The mere sight of a pointed bamboo stump cut slantwise led her to fear that her son could get hurt on it if he took a tumble. But a disease took his life at a young age. Iwami was startled to discover that the sight of a bamboo stump no longer induced any fear in her.

"I used to concentrate my attention so much on my own child alone that I didn't care about a child next door," Iwami said. "I felt ashamed about that."

Her autobiography also mentions that moment in her life.

"I learned that many things were still left in this world for me to do," she wrote in the book. "That was the starting point for my own rebirth."

Iwami remarried the head priest of Hofukuji temple and began making the rounds of new settlements as a "development public health nurse." She put her heart and soul into improving the health of villagers, children in particular. Nowhere else than in the natural environment of her newfound "sweet home" did she see a shield for preserving lives.

"What's the situation in Fukushima like?" Iwami would ask me every time I met her.

She would listen to me with a serious look when I told her about the harsh conditions of areas affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster of 2011 and about the plight of evacuees. Perhaps her mind's eye at the time was seeing the terrain in Fukushima covered with bamboo stumps.

'AUTHENTIC SKY' OVER FUKUSHIMA

The Fukushima Renewable Energy Institute, part of the National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology (AIST), was opened in spring last year in the city of Koriyama to serve as a center for the rebuilding of Fukushima Prefecture.

Three pieces of Japanese-style paintings are hanging in its main building. They were painted by Kaneko Takahashi, a resident of Maebashi, the capital of Gunma Prefecture, on the southern side of Mount Akagiya, who died at 80 late last year. The works were donated in March by the painter's oldest son, Masaki, 52, a research manager at the AIST's Research Institute of Geology and Geoinformation.

"My mother insisted on living with Mount Akagiya standing in the background," the painter's son said. "She continued to believe she was the happiest that way."

Takahashi took motifs from Fukushima after the 2011 disasters.

“So: Fukushima no Umi” (In thought: seas of Fukushima), her 2012 work, and “Seiso no Umi (Fukushima)” (Ocean blue (Fukushima)), her 2013 piece, each show a woman, painted as large as the canvas, casting her eyes downward against the backdrop of a dark ocean. But “Adatara no Sora” (Skies over Adatara), her 2014 work, depicts a female figure sitting on folded legs on a green patch of earth and staring in the distance, with a bright-colored sky and mountains in the background.

Adatara is the name of a mountain in Fukushima Prefecture. In “Chieko-sho” (The Chieko Poems), a well-known collection of poems by Kotaro Takamura (1883-1956), the poet quoted his wife, Chieko, who grew up with a view of Mount Adatara, as telling him that there was no sky over Tokyo and she wished to see an “authentic sky.”

The sky on the canvas probably shows the “authentic sky” in that poetic work. The female figure in the painting is probably looking toward hopes for the future.

“The woman appears to be floating,” painter Shigeyoshi Sakai said he told Takahashi when he saw the painting. Sakai, 67, who also lives in Maebashi, is the deputy director of Nihonga-In, an association of painters to which Takahashi belonged.

“I don’t mind if she looks that way,” he quoted Takahashi as telling him.

If that is the case, the female figure probably embodies the souls of Fukushima residents who descend on their “sweet home.”

In reality, four years after the nuclear disaster, more than 100,000 residents of Fukushima remain evacuated and have yet to have an opportunity to descend on their “sweet home,” which serves as a shield for preserving lives.

Disaster training in Ehime (Ikata plant)

November 8, 2015

Nuclear disaster drills under way in Ehime

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20151108_10.html

Nov. 8, 2015 - Updated 07:16 UTC+1

Nearly 15,000 people are taking part in annual nuclear disaster drills at and around the Ikata power plant in western Japan's Ehime Prefecture. Its No.3 reactor could go back online as soon as March.

This year's 2-day version began on Sunday with the participation of locals and officials from more than 100 organizations.

The drills were held under a scenario in which the plant run by Shikoku Electric Power Company loses its reactor cooling function due to a major earthquake.

The prefecture set up a task force. Governor Tokihiro Nakamura instructed senior officials to fully prepare for such an accident.

Shikoku Electric employees checked how to respond at an emergency office built at the plant in preparation for the restart of the reactor. Last month, the prefecture and town hosting the Ikata plant gave the utility permission to put it back online.

Workers also tested a large pumping truck designed to pour water onto reactor containment vessels. They also maneuvered a robot developed to enter spaces with high radiation levels.

Staff at a nursing home about 10 kilometers from the plant practiced evacuating elderly residents in wheelchairs. Workers took the part of those with physical disabilities.

Officials will use the results of the drills to study the viability of an evacuation plan for communities near the plant.

Two days of disaster training begins at Ehime Prefecture's Ikata nuclear plant

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/11/08/national/two-days-disaster-training-begins-ehime-prefectures-ikata-nuclear-plant/#.Vj9SLr8R-ot>

JJI

The government Sunday started a two-day comprehensive disaster drill at Shikoku Electric Power Co.'s Ikata nuclear power plant in Ehime Prefecture.

The drill, which started at 8:30 a.m., assumed that the plant's reactor-cooling functions were lost because of damage to its power sources from an earthquake measuring upper 6 on the Japanese seismic intensity scale of 7 and radioactive materials leaked outside the plant as a result.

While the No. 3 reactor at the plant is likely to be reactivated sometime at the beginning of next year at the earliest, securing evacuation routes is important.

This is the third disaster drill to be conducted by the government at one of the nation's nuclear plants since the triple reactor meltdown at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power station was crippled by a magnitude-9 earthquake and subsequent huge tsunami that struck part of the Tohoku region in March 2011.

The two-day drill is being participated in by officials of the Nuclear Regulation Authority, the Cabinet Office and the Defense Ministry, as well as about 13,000 residents living near the plant, including elementary and junior high school students.

As the nuclear power station is located in the town of Ikata, on the Sadamisaki Peninsula, one major challenge is ensuring some 5,000 people living on the peninsula can be evacuated safely in case of an accident at the plant.

In the drill, residents will be evacuated by bus. On Monday, a ferry and a support ship of the Maritime Self-Defense Force will be used to evacuate about 70 residents from the peninsula to nearby Oita Prefecture.

In July this year, the NRA concluded that the Ikata No. 3 reactor meets the country's new safety standards introduced in July 2013 following the Fukushima No. 1 plant accident.

Last month, local leaders, including Ehime Gov. Tokihiro Nakamura, gave their consent to the restart of the No. 3 unit.

Still hoping to go home

November 9, 2015

Fukushima nuke crisis evacuee continues to prepare for day family can return home

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20151109p2a00m0na006000c.html>

Four and a half years after the meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, Yuji Onuma continues to make regular trips to his hometown of Futaba to tidy up and care for his house and property, which remain inside the nuclear crisis no-go zone.

"I want to prepare for the day I go home," he explains, though there is no prospect for Onuma or any of Futaba's residents returning to their hometown.

Twenty-seven years ago, Onuma, now 39, came up with a pro-nuclear energy slogan that still adorns a sign in the town. While the municipal government has decided to tear the sign down, Onuma is calling for it to be preserved as a disaster monument.

The Mainichi Shimbun continues to follow those affected by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, as well as nuclear evacuees from Fukushima Prefecture who still cannot go home due to high radiation levels in some areas near the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

No need to worry any more...

November 10, 2015

Test fishing in Fukushima reels in a clean catch fit for a king

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201511100001>



Members of a local group catch fish in waters off the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant to monitor their radiation levels on Aug. 9. (Naoyuki Takahashi)

By NAOYUKI TAKAHASHI/ Staff Writer

IWAKI, Fukushima Prefecture--An aquarium's veterinarian and a team of local volunteers are monitoring radioactive contamination of fish in waters near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant to see if the marine life is fit to be served for dinner.

The group, called "Iwaki Kaiyo Shirabetai-Umi Labo" (Iwaki marine unit and sea lab), organizes a monthly fishing excursion to check radioactive pollution of the sea near the plant.

Junichi Yagi, a 39-year-old company employee in Iwaki, and his peers began the project in autumn 2013 to log radiation figures that are independent of surveys conducted by the central government and Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the nuclear plant.

"I had been frustrated over my inability to counter an argument with data we took on our own that the sea we loved has been contaminated," Yagi said of why the group embarked on the project.

A large amount of highly contaminated water leaked into the sea shortly after the nuclear catastrophe unfolded at the plant on March 11, 2011, which was triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

Local fishermen's cooperatives resumed operations in June 2012 on a trial basis, but species that tend to accumulate higher levels of radiation are prohibited from being shipped to markets.

Leaks of radioactive water from the plant, however, have continued on and off although the pollution has not been as severe as that which took place in the immediate aftermath of the nuclear disaster.

During a trip in August, a boat left a fishing port in Iwaki to head to waters in the vicinity of the plant. It carried 21 people on board.

An hour later, the boat stopped 1.5 kilometers from the plant. From there, a red crane could be seen working on the decommissioning process there, and the No. 1 reactor was standing there stripped of its canopy.

Local residents are banned from catching fish in waters within 1.5 km from the plant in accordance with a 1966 pact concluded between TEPCO and local fishermen's cooperatives.

Using a special container, Seiichi Tomihara, a veterinarian at the aquarium Aquamarine Fukushima in Iwaki and a member of the group who was aboard the boat, scooped sea-bed soil samples at a depth of 15 meters.

The radiation dose in the air stood at 0.014 microsieverts per hour, a figure lower than a monitoring spot used as a comparison in Tokyo.

According to Tomihara and other radiation experts, radiation levels above the sea are relatively low despite being only 1.5 km from the plant because the water effectively serves as a lid.

Airborne radioactive substances eventually fall into the sea and drop to the seabed, so radioactivity in the air above the sea is more diminished than that on land.

The boat then traveled to a spot 2 km from the plant to fish with a rod and line.

The participants caught 20 flounder, rock trout and other species, a large enough catch to conduct a meaningful radiation check.

The fish and soil samples are taken to Aquamarine Fukushima in Iwaki, where their radioactivity is measured in front of visitors to the facility as part of the monthly event.

At a session in July, Tomihara adeptly separated bones from fish meat before parents and children who were attending the session.

"Meat is where radioactive cesium accumulates the most," he explained.

He gauged the radioactivity of a rock trout with a radiation dosimeter and then explained the results to his audience.

A rock trout is one of the species prohibited from distribution by local fishermen.

But its radiation levels were not high enough to be detected by a dosimeter used during the session.

The finding came as a surprise to some people.

"Even a fish caught in waters near the plant had such a low radiation level," said one of the participants of the session.

But a reading of white rockfish was 58.7 becquerels per kilo, below the national standards of 100 becquerels per kilo, but in excess of the limit of 50 becquerels set by the local fishermen's cooperatives for circulation.

Tomihara said fish born before the nuclear disaster tend to show higher levels of contamination, compared with ones born over the past few years.

The two-hour session proved to be an eye-opener for many.

"Fukushima's image before this session was something terrifying," said Satsuki Yanagisawa, a 38-year-old mother from Saku, Nagano Prefecture, who visited the aquarium with three other family members. "But I now know that its sea is gradually recovering. Seeing with my own eyes the contamination level of the fish checked convinced me of this."

Local fishermen operate on a trial basis in waters outside the 20-km zone from the plant, catching 64 varieties of fish.

Fish whose radioactivity is found below the fisheries cooperative standards are sold to local shops or Tokyo's Tsukiji fish market.

According to the prefectural government, none of the fish that have been caught since April for its radiation survey showed levels above the national limit.

Twenty-nine kinds of fish are currently restricted from distribution, but the ban is expected to be lifted for them step by step.

Participants in the lab session can taste dishes cooked using the fish local fishermen bring in during the trial operations, such as deep-fried Pacific cod and pasta with blue crab cream sauce.

Many families stop by and sample a free dish.

Yagi hopes the program on fish and pollution at the aquarium will help visitors gain a better understanding of the actual situation of the sea off Fukushima Prefecture.

"We don't mean to push the view that Fukushima products are safe," he said. "I hope that more and more people will pay attention to the condition of waters off Fukushima through conversations such as, 'I have tried fish caught off Iwaki' and, 'Oh, is it safe to eat?' "

Elections in Fukushima: Difficult

November 12, 2015

Candidates, voters lament difficulties of mayor election for evacuated Fukushima town

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20151112p2a00m0na017000c.html>

Candidates and voters are both decrying the lack of information getting to out-of-prefecture evacuees about a mayoral election for the town of Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, which has been evacuated due to the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster.

Three candidates are competing for the position, with the vote to be held on Nov. 15. However, candidates are in many cases unable to learn the addresses of around one-quarter of the town's voters who have evacuated out of the prefecture, making it more difficult to get their messages to them.

On Nov. 9, one candidate could be seen in front of Shibuya Station in Tokyo, microphone in hand as he announced, "I have come here to get my message out to as many of the nation's evacuees as I can." Around 20 residents of Namie who have evacuated to the Tokyo metropolitan area gathered for the speech, but the rest of the crowd mostly passed by, although a few did stop and direct their phone cameras at the sight.

The candidate says, "If passersby will post on Twitter, then my message will get out to more people." According to the town's election administration commission, the Public Offices Election Act does not forbid making outdoor speeches outside of the area holding an election.

There is still no estimate of when radioactive decontamination in around 80 percent of Namie will be removed. Of the around 16,000 eligible voters in the town's population, about 4,000 now live outside of Fukushima Prefecture, spreading across 44 different prefectures. This mayor election is the second since the disaster, but the first was settled without a vote. For this election, reconstruction policy for the town is among the central issues.

The election commission has extended the length of the campaign period to 10 days instead of the usual five days, and it is mailing out fliers with the candidates' positions on them to voters. However, the candidates' election teams are dissatisfied with these fliers, saying there was not enough space to lay out their platforms. One candidate, expecting the mail to be forwarded to voters' current address, sent out

6,000 documents related to a political organization of his, but around half of these were returned due to the inability to deliver them. While the town government knows the evacuation addresses of the population, it is not giving that information to the candidates' campaign staff, saying that would be a breach of privacy.

A senior member of one candidate's campaign staff says, "We cannot even hand out fliers to the voters. Can this really be called a democratic election?"

There is also dissatisfaction among voters. Kiyomi Kanazawa, 43, who has evacuated to Tokyo with her husband, says, "If I don't research on the Internet, it is hard to even know what is going on in the town. Even if I try to hear what the candidates' thoughts are on residents' return, I cannot hear what they have to say directly. I feel that we have less to work with in making our decision than people who evacuated to locations within Fukushima Prefecture."

Professor of political awareness Masao Matsumoto of Saitama University, who is knowledgeable about election systems, says, "I think they should have about a month-long election period. They also need to come up with their own ways to inform voters, such as putting videos from candidates on the town website."

Fishing: Disaster "a thing of the past"

November 12, 2015

Macho marine calendar fishes for attention to Tohoku industry

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201511120056>

By NORIHIKO KUWABARA/ Staff Writer

SENDAI--A fishing association is showcasing muscles, not mussels, to promote the appeal of the local industry here that is moving past the devastation wrought nearly five years ago.

Twelve hunky fishermen and brokers in their 20s through 30s who overcame the effects of the 2011 Great East Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster are featured in the Tohoku Gyogyo Danshi Calendar 2016 (Tohoku men of the fishery industry calendar 2016).

The calendar was created by Fisherman Japan, a general incorporated association comprising fishermen and wholesalers in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, and Tokyo-based Naigai Publishing Co.

Haruka Sugawara, an editor at Naigai Publishing, came up with the idea for the calendar to show the actual situation of the fishing industry, which is often associated with "3K" negative images. 3K refers to "kitsui" (difficult), "kiken" (dangerous) and "kitanai" (dirty).

"We highlighted the young men because we also wanted women to take interest in the calendar," Sugawara, 27, said.

The 12 men operate in the three prefectures--Miyagi, Fukushima and Iwate--hardest hit in the March 2011 triple disaster.

The monthly photos show, for example, muscular young fishermen "models" hauling trawl nets on board a ship and steering a fishing vessel under the evening sun.

“Although everyone in the calendar suffered from the disaster, the experience became a thing of the past for them,” said Keisuke Hirai, the 36-year-old photographer in Ishinomaki who shot the images for the calendar.

“They have now gotten over the disaster and turned their attention to the ocean,” he said. “I took pictures of them showing such an attitude.”

The B4-sized Tohoku Gyogyo Danshi Calendar 2016 is priced at 1,706 yen (\$14), including tax. Part of the proceeds will be used for activities to nurture young fishermen through Fisherman Japan.

Surveying Fukushima disaster's impact on society

November 13, 2015

Researchers learn from Fukushima residents

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Nov. 13, 2015 - Updated 14:06 UTC+1

The United Nations University in Tokyo has held a **public seminar about understanding and communicating risks tied to the 2011 nuclear disaster in Fukushima.**

The seminar on Friday heard reports from 5 of the university's researchers. They surveyed evacuees and municipal officials to learn about the nuclear accident's impact on society, and obstacles to rebuilding.

Tanja Perko, of Belgian Nuclear Research Center, suggested that experts or the government should not simply teach local people about radiation.

She said Belgian officials had decided where to store radioactive waste by getting citizens involved in -*+ discussions. She said it's important for people with a range of views to take part.

Rika Morioka, of Myanmar Partners in Policy and Research, said **forums are needed to allow women's views to be reflected in government decisions.**

The research team plans to compile the survey results and make recommendations to Fukushima Prefecture and local municipalities next March.

New app for evacuees

November 15, 2015

Fukushima Pref. designs app to provide local information for nuclear evacuees

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20151115p2a00m0na003000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- The Fukushima Prefectural Government has built **an app for smartphones and tablet computers that offers local news and information for Fukushima residents who have been forced to evacuate** in the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake and ensuing nuclear meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

The free app offers information about 12 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture that are still under evacuation orders and 18 additional municipalities where many of the residents from those restricted zones and voluntary evacuees currently live. With messages and maps, app users can see various kinds of local information for each municipality, including the facility relocation of elementary, junior and senior high schools, services at local hospitals as well as information on their courtesy shuttles, recruitment information for volunteer workers and event schedules at shopping streets and other establishments. An official from the prefectural government's information policy division said, **"We hope that evacuees use the app to help them in making decisions on returning home."**

The app also offers links to job information and it is designed to allow users to easily search for local information on everyday activities.

New winery in Fukushima

November 25, 2015

New Fukushima winery uncorks effort to help farmers with local wines, fruit liqueurs

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201511250001>

By MAKOTO TAKADA/ Staff Writer

KORIYAMA, Fukushima Prefecture--With the raising of a glass to local farmers, a venture winery here has started operations in hopes of helping local fruit orchards that have withered in the aftermath of the March 2011 triple disaster.

The Fukushima Ouse Winery, located in the Ouse-machi district in Koriyama, which was officially launched on Oct. 27, produces wines using locally harvested grapes.

"I hope it will provide a huge breakthrough to the stagnant agricultural sector in the prefecture," said Toshikazu Hashimoto, 70, one of the farmers in Koriyama who will produce wine grapes for the project. "I have as many high expectations as I feel responsibility. If I can produce quality wine grapes, then I will consider expanding my vineyard."

The winery, a joint venture between the city government and the Disaster Relief Foundation of the major trading firm Mitsubishi Corp., also plans to produce fruit liqueurs using peaches, pears and apples harvested in Fukushima Prefecture.

It has formed a tieup with four grape farmers in Koriyama, including Hashimoto, who will grow wine grapes for the first time for the project. It will take three years for the first harvest if their seedlings grow according to schedule.

"I was a bit skeptical if the project would be viable when I was first offered the chance to grow wine grapes, but I also thought that the project would fit perfectly with my desire to show people how Fukushima has recovered," said Hideaki Nakao, a 37-year-old farmer who is participating in the project. "Then my desire to take on a new challenge won out and cast away all my doubts at last."

The winery opened on a 9,000-square-meter city-owned plot in the Ouse-machi district, located about 70 kilometers from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The construction cost, including the cost of 26 wine-making tanks, and the initial cost of raw materials totaled about 1 billion yen (\$8.14 million). The brewing tanks can store up to 38,000 liters of wine, while distillery machinery imported from Germany can simultaneously process 300 liters of liquor.

Until the partnered farmers in Koriyama start harvesting wine grapes three years from now, the winery will procure grapes from vineyards around Fukushima Prefecture.

It has also signed a contract with 10 farmers in the prefecture who will supply substandard or fruit with superficial defects, which they cannot ship directly to market, to the winery.

Winery officials said they hope to ship the first bottles of wine and fruit liqueurs early next year.

After three years, the annual production is expected to reach 12,000 liters and eventually total 25,000 to 30,000 liters in the future with annual sales of around 70 million yen, the officials said.

The winery also plans to set up a tasting room and allow visitors to tour the facility by March 2017 to attract more tourists to the area.

According to the prefectural office, the total shipping volume of fruits from the prefecture has recovered to similar levels before the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

The average price of the fruit products harvested in the prefecture, however, has not returned to pre-disaster levels following a nosedive after the unfurling of the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

For example, the shipping volume of peaches totaled 27,000 tons in 2014, an increase from 26,200 tons in 2010, but its average wholesale price at the Tokyo Metropolitan Central Wholesale Market was 358 yen per kilogram in 2014, down from 439 yen in 2010.

The number of peach farmers who are primarily located in northern Fukushima dropped by around 200 households from the pre-disaster level of 2,400.

Koriyama city and the Disaster Relief Foundation, which was set up by Mitsubishi Corp. in 2012, signed a partnership agreement to promote the city's agricultural businesses and tourism in February.

Namie, Onagawa, Yamamoto: Tax revenues still decreasing

November 24, 2015

Tax revenues slump in municipalities hardest-hit by 3/11 disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201511240060>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Total tax revenues in 42 municipalities affected by the 2011 triple disaster have surpassed pre-3/11 levels, but more than half of them are still experiencing declines in tax income, an Asahi Shimbun survey showed.

The increase came mainly from larger municipalities in urban areas that were not so severely hit by the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami or meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Companies in those municipalities are gaining profits from reconstruction projects and paying more in local taxes.

Although these projects and the municipalities' rise in tax revenue may only be temporary, the harder-hit areas have yet to reach that point in their rebuilding efforts.

Twenty-three of the 42 municipalities surveyed showed decreases in tax revenues for fiscal 2014, which ended in March 2015, from fiscal 2010.

Many are small communities that were devastated in the disaster and are still struggling to recover their daily lives.

The 42 municipalities, many of them located on the Pacific coasts of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures, had all released their fiscal 2014 financial statements by October. They also included areas where residents were ordered to evacuate after the disaster unfolded at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The Asahi Shimbun surveyed the 42 municipalities' annual tax revenues for fiscal 2010 to fiscal 2014 to determine changes over the five-year period. The Great East Japan Earthquake struck in March 2011, the last month of fiscal 2010.

According to the survey, the 42 municipalities obtained tax revenues totaling 362.7 billion yen (\$2.95 billion) in fiscal 2014, exceeding 354.4 billion yen in fiscal 2010 for the first time.

The municipality with the largest increase in terms of amount was Sendai, the capital of Miyagi Prefecture, at 9.6 billion yen, followed by Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, with a rise of 3.4 billion yen.

An increasing number of construction and other companies have set up offices in Sendai apparently for a piece of the reconstruction budget.

According to the land ministry, contracts for public works projects in the three prefectures were worth 2.4 trillion yen in fiscal 2014, 5.3 times larger than the figure for fiscal 2010.

Iwaki serves as a base for work to decommission the reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Tax revenues in Hirono, Fukushima Prefecture, rose 61.7 percent in fiscal 2014, the largest growth rate among the 42 municipalities. Revenue from the fixed asset tax increased after the expansion of a thermal power plant in the town.

Soma in Fukushima Prefecture and Ofunato in Iwate Prefecture followed in terms of the ratio of tax revenue increases, according to the survey. Both cities suffered relatively minor damage from the disaster and recovered fairly quickly.

In addition, companies in Soma and Ofunato won contracts for reconstruction projects in surrounding municipalities.

On the other end of the scale, Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, marked the biggest decreasing rate--72.9 percent--in tax revenues for fiscal 2014.

All residents of the town near the crippled nuclear plant remain in evacuation. Although tax payments from companies increased from decontamination work and other public works projects, income taxes paid by residents and fixed asset taxes have declined.

The towns of Onagawa and Yamamoto in Miyagi Prefecture also had sharp decreases in tax revenues. The towns both had a high death toll from the tsunami.

Fukushima foods: EU stops some radiation checks

November 26, 2015

EU to exempt some Fukushima foods from radiation checks

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/11/26/national/eu-exempt-fukushima-foods-radiation-checks/>

JJI

BRUSSELS – The European Union has decided to stop requiring radiation screening for some food products imported from Fukushima Prefecture, informed sources have said.

It will be the first time for the EU to exclude foods items from Fukushima from its mandatory check list since the regulation was introduced after the nuclear disaster at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant in March 2011.

Specifically, **the EU plans to exempt such items as vegetables, fruits other than persimmons and livestock products from the checks**, the sources said Wednesday.

The EU will also stop requiring screening certificates for all items currently bound by the rule that are imported from Aomori and Saitama prefectures. Additionally, rice and some other foods produced in other prefectures will be removed from the list, while a handful of edible wild plants will be added.

Japan hopes that the EU's easing of restrictions will help solidify the notion that there is no scientific basis for maintaining the regulations, sources familiar with the matter said.

South Korea bans imports of certain fishery products from Japan. Taiwan has strengthened its import regulations.

At a meeting of experts on Wednesday, the EU approved the deregulation proposal made by the European Commission **based on analysis derived from sample radiation checks**.

The commission, the executive arm of the EU, is expected to officially decide on the deregulation measures by the end of this year, the sources said.

In a meeting early this month in Luxembourg, Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida asked his European Union counterpart, Federica Mogherini, to ease or scrap the import regulations.

The government aims to boost the nation's food exports to ¥1 trillion by 2020. That compares to the ¥611.7 billion reported in 2014.

The country's food exports to the EU member nations in 2014 totaled ¥33.2 billion, accounting for 5.4 percent of Japan's overall food exports. Though the share was small, the EU-bound food exports shot up 17 percent from the preceding year.

Interview with Ken Sakamoto (Evacuate Fukushima)



坂本健 Ken Sakamoto and Tatsuyo Young – Courtesy of 坂本健

<http://www.evacuate-fukushima.com/2015/11/ken-sakamoto-protecting-housing-subsidies-for-evacuees/>

Interview with Ken Sakamoto

Protecting Housing Subsidies for Evacuees

Nov 02, 2015 Nelson SurjonEVACUEES 避難者 2

In the light of the upcoming Tokyo Olympics and its bid to show the world that Japan has fully recovered from the triple disaster that hit Tohoku in 2011, including the ongoing nuclear crisis in Fukushima and beyond, Shinzo Abe and local governments have made it clear to tens of thousands of evacuees that it is time to go home. Japan claims that sufficient decontamination work has been concluded to return evacuees safely to their contaminated land. But most aren't buying into the many propaganda tactics by local governments and are reticent to go back, rightfully so. In order to speed up the return process, the government has adopted drastic measures, such as cutting all housing subsidies and other compensations to most evacuees, by year 2018, forcing evacuees to return.

Though poorly reported by the Japanese media, Fukushima has experienced an increasing resistance from residents on this issue and numerous citizens have organized into fierce and dedicated groups and NPOs to fight against these pressuring reforms. One of their most dedicated leader is Ken Sakamoto, which I have had the privilege to meet via social Networks and introduced to me by my dear friend and member of Evacuate Fukushima 福島の子供を守れ; Yukiko Young. Sakamoto san is an incredible human being and is fighting, body and soul, to protect the lives of children and residents in Fukushima.

Sakamoto san has accepted to interview with us and we have promised to him to SHARE the voices of Fukushima – otherwise silenced by an unwilling media body. So please, support him and the thousands of

victims by reading this interview and to share aplenty. At the end of this, you will find links wherein you may donate money that will directly come in help of these victims. Many people have asked me how they could help in terms of donation, this is it!

Illuminations for evacuees

November 30, 2015

Illuminations brighten lives of Fukushima evacuees

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Nov. 29, 2015 - Updated 17:55 UTC+1

Illuminations have brought joy to a temporary housing center in Fukushima Prefecture for people who remain as evacuees since the March 2011 quake, tsunami and nuclear disaster.

A countdown ceremony for the annual event took place in Minamisoma City on Sunday. About 20,000 LED lights decorate an 8-meter tall monument and the walls of a community building.

The Minamisoma municipal office is preparing for the possible lifting of the government's evacuation order next April.

One 55-year-old temporary housing resident said she wonders if she and her parents can return home even if the evacuation order is lifted. Still, she said she enjoyed the illuminations.

Toshimichi Murai is a community leader and organizer of the illumination event. He's hoping the illuminations will lift the spirits of the evacuees.

The event ends on January 11th.

TEPCO settles over farmer's suicide

December 1, 2015

Tepco settles suit over suicide of Fukushima dairy farmer

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/12/01/national/crime-legal/tepco-settles-suit-over-suicide-of-fukushima-dairy-farmer/#.VI3J0L8R-ot>

Kyodo

Tokyo Electric Power Co. has agreed to make a payment to settle a lawsuit filed by the family of a dairy farmer who committed suicide after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear crisis, the family's lawyers said. The settlement was reached Tuesday in the Tokyo District Court. The exact sum was not disclosed, though the family had been seeking around ¥128 million in damages.

Tepco, operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, agreed to give money to the family of Shigekiyo Kanno, who died at age 54, but rejected the family's request for an apology in the settlement document.

The Kanno family's lawyers said they agreed to settle the case because Tepco "can be seen to have acknowledged the causal connection" between the suicide and the nuclear disaster, and because the settlement payment reached a level acceptable to the family.

According to the suit, Kanno owned around 40 dairy cows in Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, about 50 km from the nuclear complex. Milk shipments were suspended following the nuclear disaster triggered by the earthquake and tsunami that hit northeastern Japan on March 11, 2011.

He had to give up most of his herd and was also worried he would not be able to repay his loans.

He committed suicide in a barn in June 2011 while his wife, Vanessa, and their two sons were in the Philippines, her home country. He left messages on the barn wall that said, "If only there was no nuclear power plant" and "I no longer have the spirit to work."

In May 2013, his wife and children filed a lawsuit seeking damages over Kanno's death, saying he killed himself in despair over the future.

Vanessa Kanno, 37, said in a statement Tuesday: "I am not fully satisfied with the content of the settlement, but I've decided to resolve the issue to return to a peaceful life as soon as possible. I never want this kind of sad thing to happen again" to anyone else.

Tepco issued a statement that said, "We mourn the loss of Mr. Kanno from the bottom of our heart." See also :

TEPCO settles suit over suicide of Fukushima dairy farmer

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20151201p2g00m0dm073000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Tokyo Electric Power Co. has agreed to make a payment to settle a lawsuit filed by the family of a dairy farmer who committed suicide after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear crisis, the family's lawyers said Tuesday.[...]

TEPCO, dairy farmer's family settle over suicide

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Dec. 1, 2015 - Updated 06:48 UTC+1

The operator of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant and the family of a dairy farmer who committed suicide after the nuclear disaster reached a settlement for several hundred thousand dollars in compensation.

Shigekiyo Kanno killed himself at his farm in Soma city, Fukushima Prefecture in June 2011, leaving a note that said, "If only there were no nuclear plant."

Before his death, Kanno had complained to other dairy operators in the area that he was unable to ship milk because of the effects of the nuclear accident.

Kanno's wife, Vanessa, and her 2 sons had sued Tokyo Electric Power Company for compensation and TEPCO initially intended to fight the case in court.

But the two sides eventually reached an agreement, with the provision that TEPCO will not include an apology in the settlement papers.

The lawyer representing the family said it's good that they could settle at an early stage, but he wishes that TEPCO had apologized.

The wife said through the attorney that she is not satisfied with the settlement but decided to agree because life has been hard after losing her husband.

She said she wants her small children to return to a peaceful life as soon as possible, and that she hopes such a tragedy never happens again.

Iwate salmon

December 4, 2015

Iwate's salmon delicacy season goes on, despite tsunami-depleted catch

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201512040077>

By MASATAKA YAMAURA/ Staff Writer

KAMAISHI, Iwate Prefecture--Production of "aramaki zake" (lightly salted salmon), a popular year-end gift, has started in Iwate Prefecture but on a still-reduced scale due to the destruction caused by the 2011 tsunami.

Rows of fish seen hanging from racks to dry here on Dec. 1 were among the 1.96 million salmon caught in the ocean by fishermen in the prefecture by the end of November, according to the Iwate prefectural government.

Although the northeastern prefecture still boasts the largest salmon catch on Honshu, the total this year is only about 60 percent of the level in 2010, a year before the earthquake and tsunami devastated the Tohoku region.

The tsunami in March 2011 destroyed salmon hatcheries in the prefecture, reducing the number of salmon fry released into the wild.

In the two years after the disaster, the number of fry released was about 70 percent of pre-disaster levels.

Another reason for this year's low catch number is the rise in ocean temperatures, which has delayed the southward migration of salmon.

Kamaishi and other parts of Iwate Prefecture, where aramaki zake production began, are continuing their reconstruction efforts, such as building coastal levees and reviving the salmon industry.

"I believe the salmon will come back here if the ocean temperatures drop and the north wind blows," said Nobuyuki Sasaki, a 40-year-old fisherman in Miyako. "We should hold on to hope."

Has survey on evacuees' wishes been used against them?

December 5, 2015

Nuclear evacuees surveyed about living in public housing later became non-eligible

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20151205p2a00m0na013000c.html>

Fukushima Prefecture included more people in surveys for 2013 estimates on demand for new public housing after the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant meltdowns than it ended up allowing into the housing, and the estimates based on those surveys were never publically released, it has been learned.

The estimates were reported in a document obtained by the Mainichi Shimbun. **This document was created in May 2013 by a Tokyo consulting company paid around 30 million yen by the Fukushima Prefectural Government for the work.** The estimates were based on fiscal 2012 surveys by the Reconstruction Agency and the Fukushima Prefectural Government of evacuees from 11 municipalities near the crippled plant.

The estimates were made based on three types of evacuees seeking a place in the housing: people wanting to live there until evacuation orders for their home municipalities were lifted; people wanting to live there after evacuation orders for their home municipalities were lifted but until a livable environment had been established; and people wanting to live in the housing permanently.

The estimated numbers of residences required for the three types of evacuees were between 3,136 and 5,663 for the first group; between 2,743 and 4,172 for the second group; and between 3,366 and 4,837 for the third group. Only the first category, however, matches up with the standards for "**long-term evacuees**" -- the only type of evacuee allowed to apply for the residences. Additionally, two of the 11 municipalities covered by the estimates, the city of Tamura and the town of Naraha, had their evacuation orders lifted in April 2014 and September 2015, respectively, making their residents ineligible for the housing.

The units were first proposed during the Democratic Party of Japan administration, and in September 2012 the Fukushima Prefectural Government announced preparations to build the first 500 residences. At this point, the project was being funded from reconstruction funds, and which evacuees would be eligible for a place had not yet been decided. At the end of that year, however, the Liberal Democratic Party and Komeito took over the government, and at a January 2013 meeting on disaster recovery, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe ordered the creation of a plan to allow evacuees to return home quickly, and to secure homes for long-term evacuees. **The Act on Special Measures for the Reconstruction and Revitalization of Fukushima was revised in April 2013 to allow special government funding for the new housing, and to restrict eligibility to long-term evacuees.**

The unreleased documents obtained by the Mainichi state explicitly that "under the current system to restrict entry into publically-managed housing to long-term evacuees," others hoping to keep living in the units after their evacuation orders have been lifted "may not be included."

A representative for the Fukushima Prefectural Government said, "It's not good to say that the national government 'toyed with us' by its policy shift, but the survey on evacuees' wishes and the establishment of the new fund (with its eligibility restrictions) happened in parallel." The official added that prefectural staff had to start applying the restrictions "in a hurry" to keep in line with national government policy.

The Fukushima Prefectural Government has announced 4,890 planned public housing units for nuclear disaster evacuees, but even when combined with around 2,800 such residences for tsunami survivors, the number of residences covers only 17 percent of the around 43,700 Fukushima households that remained without a permanent home as of the end of last year.

Not every evacuee is eligible

December 2, 2015

Post-disaster recovery public housing' not meeting real needs

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20151202/p2a/00m/0na/017000c>

FUKUSHIMA -- Emergency temporary housing facilities that were built in the wake of the March 2011 nuclear meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant will be closed down in about 15 months, but evacuees who are ineligible for more long-term "post-disaster recovery public housing" are at a loss about what to do when their time is up.

Evacuees whose homes are located in areas that have been deemed "difficult to return to zones" are the only ones eligible for the new public housing currently under construction in preparation for the shutdown of temporary housing facilities. As such, the new housing units are fewer in number than the number of households who were still evacuated as of the end of 2014.

But because many of these eligible evacuees have been able to receive sufficient compensation from the stricken nuclear power plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TECPO), to buy new homes, the number of applications for recovery public housing is much lower than had been predicted. Meanwhile, those who are not eligible to apply face some difficult decisions when they are forced out of their temporary homes.

Toshio Niizuma, 66, who evacuated from his home in the Fukushima Prefecture town of Naraha and is living in a temporary housing unit in the prefectural city of Iwaki, is irate over the situation he and his family have been forced into.

When the nuclear disaster broke out in March 2011, an evacuation order was issued for the entire town of Naraha. Niizuma left the home that he had just built an addition to six months prior for his 47-year-old son and his family. Having recently wrapped up a 33-year stint as a migrant worker in Chiba Prefecture working for a trucking company, Niizuma had just begun to enjoy life with his family.

When the evacuation order was issued, Niizuma first fled with his wife to a relative's home in Saitama Prefecture. Wanting to be close to his son's family, who had moved into a temporary housing facility in

Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, Niizuma then moved into a different temporary housing facility in the same city.

Starting in 2013, he began participating periodically in a temporary home visit program to Naraha, and now he commutes to his home from Iwaki once every two days. Accompanying Niizuma on one of his visits, this reporter found that the two-story wooden house, with an area of approximately 290 square meters, had been spared major damage.

However, radiation levels in the backyard, which had been decontaminated two years ago, had not gone down as expected. Trees that had been planted there 60 years ago were chopped down for another round of decontamination work. A radiation dosimeter placed between the tree stumps rose gradually, and close to where water from the gutters ends up when it rains, radiation levels exceeded 10 microsieverts per hour.

On Sept. 5 this year, the central government lifted the evacuation order that had been issued for the town of Naraha. Temporary housing facilities will be shut down at the end of March 2017, yet Naraha residents are not eligible to apply for long-term recovery public housing being built in the cities of Fukushima, Iwaki and elsewhere.

In Naraha, there is now a research facility dedicated to decommissioning the stricken nuclear plant, and related companies have established their bases there. Some 1,100 people working on decontamination and decommissioning work live in the approximately 10 prefab accommodations that have been set up, giving the town the appearance and feel of still being the front lines of the nuclear disaster. Perhaps because of this, few people have moved back to Naraha despite the government's revocation of its evacuation order, and Niizuma says that of the 90 or so households in his hamlet, only about three are actually spending nights in their homes.

To some extent, Niizuma has a desire to return to his home in Naraha after the temporary housing facilities are shut down. But he hasn't been able to broach the subject with his son and his family. "If my son and I get into an argument and he decides not to return to Naraha, we'd have to live apart. And it's not like we want to move out of our temporary housing units."

If he were eligible, Niizuma says he'd want to apply for long-term post-disaster recovery public housing with his son's family, in order to buy some time until a "final decision" has to be made. But under the current circumstances, he isn't afforded that extra time.

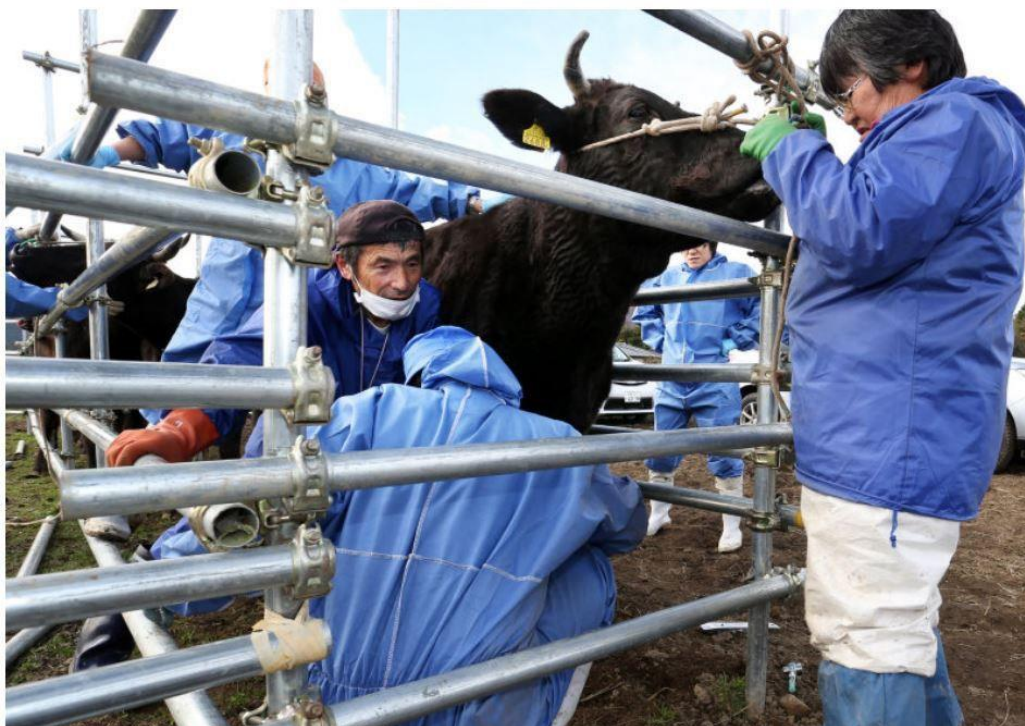
"Why isn't recovery public housing available to Naraha residents?" Niizuma wonders. "Maybe they thought we'd settle down somewhere else and never come back."

Cows in difficult-to-return zones

December 7, 2015

Cows tested for radiation in Fukushima 'difficult-to-return' zones

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20151207/p2a/00m/0na/019000c>



Veterinarians perform blood tests and other examinations on cows in the town of Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, on Dec. 6, 2015, in order to determine their levels of radiation exposure. (Mainichi)

FUKUSHIMA -- In an effort to determine the radiation exposure levels of cows living in "difficult-to-return" zones along coastal areas of Fukushima Prefecture following the 2011 Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster, a local organization carried out a health survey of the animals on Dec. 6 via methods including blood sampling.

The testing was performed by the Society for Animal Refugee & Environment post-Nuclear Disaster, which is comprised of veterinary researchers from Iwate University and Kitasato University, along with local cattle farmers.

The organization has been voluntarily spearheading investigations since September 2012 into the impact of radiation exposure among cows living in evacuation zones.

At the farm of Mitsuhide Ikeda, 54, who has around 50 cows in the town of Okuma, the veterinarians soothed the cows by calling out "It's alright, it's alright," as they steadied the animals in the fenced-in enclosure. They then carried out the testing procedures, which focused primarily upon drawing the animals' blood.

After the blood samples are taken back to the universities, tests will be carried out such as measuring the concentration of radioactive cesium, as well as determining whether or not damage has occurred to the animals' DNA.

Similar testing was also carried out the previous day on Dec. 5 in the prefectural town of Namie. Over the course of the two days, a total of more than 120 cows were examined in both towns.

The (after-tsunami) Koizumi tomatoes

December 7, 2015

Tomatoes ripen at former processing site for tsunami debris

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201512070052>

By YOSUKE FUKUDOME/ Staff Writer

KESENNUMA, Miyagi Prefecture--The first tomato harvest has started at a hydroponic greenhouse here on a site that was once covered with tsunami debris.

The tomatoes are ripening in 125 rows of plants at the 2-hectare Sun Fresh Koizumi Farm in the southern part of Kesennuma city. Each row is about 100 meters long, giving the greenhouse the look of an indoor forest of tomato plants.

Four to five tons of tomatoes from the farm are expected to be shipped daily.

Kesennuma is known for its agriculture and fishery industries. But after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami struck the Tohoku region on March 11, 2011, the city became associated with disaster.

The area in the Koizumi district where the tomatoes are now growing used to be a rice field. The tsunami destroyed that field, and the area later became a processing site for the mountains of debris from the disaster.

After the land was cleaned up and the farm was built, the soilless greenhouse began operations in September this year.

"I want to turn this place into the center of the agricultural industry that is just as thriving as the fishery sector," said Mamoru Oikawa, 54, head of the farm.

Bells will toll for Tomioka evacuees

December 8, 2015

PHOTO: Comforting sounds of home to ring in New Year's for Fukushima evacuees

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201512080072>

By YOSUKE FUKUDOME/ Staff Writer

TOMIOKA, Fukushima Prefecture--Scattered throughout Japan, evacuees from Tomioka will be treated to the familiar sounds of home at New Year's.

Employees of radio broadcaster Odagaisama FM visited Tomioka's Suwajinja shrine and Jizoin temple on Dec. 7 to record "Joya-no-kane" and the peals of the Shinto shrine's traditional bells.

It will broadcast the tolling of the bells to Tomioka evacuees to ring in the New Year and bring them a comforting sound.

Odagaisama FM, a temporary radio broadcaster serving the evacuated residents of Tomioka, is currently based in Koriyama, further inland from seaside Tomioka. The temple and shrine are located in the

“restricted residence area” of the town, which was evacuated following the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011.

“Joya-no-kane” is a Buddhist tradition heard on New Year’s Eve. The bells ring out 108 times around midnight to cleanse worshippers of the 108 earthly desires.

Nine million bags of radioactive waste kicking around

December 10, 2015

Over 9 million bags of nuclear cleanup waste piled up across Fukushima Pref.

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20151210/p2a/00m/0na/020000c>



Mounds of bags full of waste from the decontamination of areas around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant are seen at a temporary storage site in Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture, in this recent photo taken from a Mainichi Shimbun helicopter. (Mainichi)

The number of bags of waste from decontamination efforts around the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant reached a little under 9.16 million as of the end of September according to Fukushima Prefecture and the Environment Ministry.

The 1-cubic-meter bags are found at some 114,700 interim storage or decontamination sites across the prefecture. In the town of Tomioka -- covered by a nuclear disaster evacuation order -- mounds of bags have grown so tall that they obscure the power shovels used to move and stack the waste, the black balls covering every sliver of landscape.

The bags of waste are typically stacked four layer high, with a fifth layer of uncontaminated soil laid on top to block radiation. Waterproof sheets are also used to stop rainwater from getting into the bags and becoming contaminated.

Negotiations with the towns of Okuma and Futaba -- both under evacuation orders -- to establish mid-term waste storage facilities there have been hard-going, and the start of construction is nowhere in sight.

Watch this one-minute video!

Video : Bags of radiation-contaminated waste pile up in Fukushima

<http://mainichi.jp/english/videos/>

Students hit hard by triple disaster

December 1, 2015

Students hit hard by 2011 disasters suffer poverty, lose educational chances: survey

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20151201/p2a/00m/0na/001000c>

An organization providing educational support to children who were affected by the triple disasters of March 2011 released a report Nov. 30 indicating that households in which the father is either unemployed or is on short-term employment contracts have doubled compared to pre-disaster numbers. Many students thus said they believe they will have to give up going to college or graduate school due to family finances.

The white paper, which investigated children's poverty and gaps in educational environments and resources, was compiled by Chance for Children, a public interest incorporated association based in Nishinomiya, Hyogo Prefecture, based on a survey it conducted from May to September 2014. The organization received responses from 2,338 households who were affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster, to whom they have offered assistance. According to the organization, this marked the first time a survey of this scale was conducted regarding children's educational circumstances in areas directly affected by such massive disasters.

The report showed that 13.1 percent of fathers in the surveyed disaster areas were either unemployed or short-term contract employees, about double the 6.3 percent recorded prior to March 2011. Conversely, regular employment suffered a drop of 9.4 percentage points, down to 78.5 percent. The percentage of households with a yearly income of less than 2.5 million yen jumped by 8.5 percentage points compared to pre-March 11, 2011 figures, to 36.9 percent.

Asked what their ideal educational trajectories were, 56.2 percent of third-year junior high school students who responded to the survey said they wanted to attend "university or more (graduate school)." However, asked what they believed was realistic, only 44.3 percent said "university or more (graduate school)," showing an 11.9-percentage point gap between ideal and realistic educational goals. Some 13.4 percent of students cited tight household finances as the main reason for this gap. In a similar survey

taken of students and their parents in fiscal 2011, only 4.3 percent of students pointed to household finances as a factor in choosing realistic educational paths, illustrating a rise in the proportion of students being forced to choose "realistic" educational paths that run counter to their own wishes.

Meanwhile, a look at the income of households with junior high or high school students who have refused to go to school showed that the lower the income, the greater the likelihood that students refuse to attend school. Students coming from households with an annual income of less than 1 million yen accounted for 17.9 percent of students with a history of truancy. A greater number of students from low-income households also said that they felt they did not have a place where they felt safe, or that they had experienced suicidal tendencies.

"The effects of the 2011 disasters are seen not only in education, but also in everyday life and elsewhere, and their multiple causes -- such as household finances and interpersonal relationships -- are intertwined," says Chance of Children's representative director Yusuke Imai. "The central government, local governments and communities must collaborate to support students by expanding (non-loan) scholarships and institutionalizing a system of social workers specializing in children."

State secrets laws : Potential for govt. cover-ups

December 12, 2015

EDITORIAL: Anxiety still lingers over 1-year-old secrecy law

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201512120025>

A full year has passed since the state secrets protection law came into force.

"I believe the citizens are aware that nothing of the kind that they initially feared has taken place during this time," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said.

We, however, disagree.

That is because, by the very nature of the secrecy law that took effect on Dec. 10, 2014, it remains impossible to find out from the outside if any information that is inconvenient for the government has not been withheld or if the law has not been applied in an arbitrary manner.

"I think I should have taken more time to provide more detailed explanations," Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said at a news conference two years ago when he had the state secrets protection law enacted. "From now on, I will explain carefully to erase people's concerns."

It remains to be seen if careful explanations have actually been provided or if people's concerns have really been erased.

It has been disclosed recently that in 2013, prior to the Cabinet approval of the state secrets protection bill, the Board of Audit of Japan pointed out to the Cabinet Secretariat that government ministries and agencies could refuse to submit documents that contain designated state secrets, a situation that was "constitutionally problematic."

In response, the Cabinet Secretariat said it would issue a notice to instruct government ministries and agencies to comply with auditing as before, but it has yet to make good on that word. Board of Audit officials said no ministry or agency has so far cited the secrecy law to withhold documents, but said the notice should be issued at any rate, because there is the undeniable possibility that auditing could be obstructed in the future.

Article 90 of the Constitution says that “final accounts of the expenditures and revenues of the state shall be audited annually by a board of audit.”

That provision was included to reflect that, under the prewar Constitution of the Empire of Japan, the government’s secret funds and military expenses were excluded from auditing, which resulted in a lack of auditing control over the ballooning expenses related to the armed forces.

The Cabinet Secretariat may be taking that historical context and the weight of the Constitution too lightly. It should promptly issue the notice as it said it would.

It has also been learned that a survey trip to Japan by a U.N. special rapporteur on freedom of expression, which had initially been scheduled for early December, was delayed at the last minute at the request of the Japanese government, which asked the rapporteur to postpone his visit to autumn 2016 at the earliest.

The rapporteur had planned to gather information on the state secrets protection law and other matters. A Foreign Ministry official said the delay was not requested because Tokyo found anything inconvenient in the issues to be surveyed, but simply because it was difficult to schedule the availability of officials in charge of the matter. But suspicion against administrative organs will linger as long as the essential nature of the state secrets protection law, which allows them to conceal whatever they wish, remains the same. Now is the time for Abe to “explain carefully to erase people’s concerns.” Doing so amounts to a minimal duty for the person responsible for brushing aside deep-rooted criticism and concerns to have the secrecy law enacted.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Dec. 12

December 8, 2015

Secrecy legislation carries potential for serious government cover-ups

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20151208/p2a/00m/0na/023000c>

Under the Constitution of the Empire of Japan, which remained in force from 1890 until 1947, the Board of Audit of Japan faced limitations on checking military-related budgets. Since secret funds of the government and military were exempt from auditing in those days, the bulk of military-related budgets remained in a “black box.”

The book “Kaikai Kenshin Hyakunenshi” (100-year history of the Board of Audit), published in 1980 by the Board of Audit of Japan, states that there were considerable constraints on auditing under the Military Secrets Protection Law (revised in 1937). The law was designed to punish those who leaked military secrets.

Based on lessons learned from this past, Article 90 of the current Constitution stipulates that “Final accounts of the expenditures and revenues of the State shall be audited annually by a Board of Audit ...”

This means that the Board of Audit is independent of the Cabinet. There have been no provisions so far even in the Self-Defense Forces Act that limit the provision of defense secrets to the Board of Audit. Specially designated state secrets include documents on budgetary measures for defense and foreign policies.

Regarding Section 1 of Article 10 of the Act on Protection of Specially Designated Secrets, Hiroshi Arikawa, former commissioner of the Board of Audit and professor of public policy at Nihon University, said, “If those who are subject to auditing can select which documents to submit, I would have to say it infringes on Article 90 of the Constitution.”

The special secrets act, which imposes heavy penalties on those who leak important state secrets and those who obtain such information through unauthorized means, carries the potential for serious cover-ups of information. The government should make efforts to allay such doubts.

Maybe the last opportunity to get an idea of what happened

December 14, 2015

Remnants of confusion remain at Fukushima emergency center

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201512140051>

By TAKUYA ISAYAMA/ Staff Writer

TOMIOKA, Fukushima Prefecture--Papers filled with nuclear-related information, unfinished rice balls and protective masks remain scattered in a facility here, testament to the rapid retreat of an entire town early in the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Tomioka town officials used the facility, known as the cultural exchange center, as an emergency response center immediately after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami struck the coast and swamped the nearby Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant on March 11, 2011.

They all had to flee the following day.

The center has remained as was in March 2011, and **the public on Dec. 13 was allowed to enter the facility for the first time to get an idea of what had happened.**

"I was stunned by what I saw here, which was a reminder of the chaos that took place at that time," said Masato Miura, a 65-year-old from Iwaki who joined the tour of about 20 participants.

He said he had previously visited the building when he worked for a subcontractor of Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the nuclear plant, when the nation's worst nuclear accident was unfolding.

The tour was organized by a committee that promotes the preservation of remains of the Fukushima disaster to educate the public about the damage done to Tomioka. The committee gathers and stores data on the magnitude-9.0 quake, tsunami and nuclear disaster.

The town government building lost power in the disaster and decided to use the facility as the control center for the disaster response.

Tomioka is within a radius of 20 kilometers from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. The town co-hosts TEPCO's Fukushima No. 2 nuclear plant, which was also hit by the tsunami but did not suffer damage to its reactors.

On March 12, 2011, an evacuation order was issued as the nuclear crisis worsened, and all town workers and 16,000 residents had to leave the area by evening.

The town employees left behind their notes, garbage, food and protective gear in their flight from the facility. Tomioka residents are still living in evacuation today, although they are allowed to make day-trips to their hometown.

The committee is trying to keep records of the facility by producing a layout of things left there and documenting what was written on white boards and papers.

The public may not get another opportunity to view the rooms littered with papers and other remnants from the disaster.

The town government, which has been operating primarily from Koriyama in Fukushima Prefecture, plans to renovate the building whose interior has become seriously dilapidated.

End of disaster-response radio station in Onagawa

December 16, 2015

Disaster-response radio station set up after 2011 quake to end operations

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20151216/p2a/00m/0na/011000c>

ONAGAWA, Miyagi -- A temporary disaster-response radio station set up after the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake will cease operations in March next year, the station and the local municipal government here announced on Dec. 16.

The town of Onagawa, which had a population of around 10,000, lost 827 people as well as government buildings, shops and houses when it was hit by the post-quake tsunami. On request from the municipal government, the station, called "Onagawa Saigai FM," began broadcasting from April 21, 2011. Various locals have been involved in its programs, from junior high students to fishermen to former junior high school teachers.

The station has toured temporary housing for evacuees and broadcast the stories of the people living there, given out lifestyle information for evacuees, and passed on news stories to brighten the mood of the town.

Public broadcaster NHK created a television drama based on the station, and many celebrities such as the pop group Momoiro Clover Z have regularly come to give their support to the station. Station representatives also say that it has received a large amount of donations from around the nation due to its simultaneous Internet stream.

Tomohiro Oshima, 42, who lives in Tokyo but continues to put together shows for the station as a volunteer, says, "It is a miracle that the station has been able to continue for these five years, primarily running on donations. I want to thank the people who have supported us. I also want to use the knowledge I have gained to continue to give cheer to Onagawa."

Onagawa Mayor Yoshiaki Suda, who has himself appeared in the station's programming, said, "Onagawa Saigai FM has accomplished a lot, but our town's recovery has proceeded, and the time has come for the station to change into a new form."

As the town has recovered from the disaster, local station staff have started wanting to change jobs, and it has become difficult for the station to maintain the personnel it needs.

Other temporary disaster-response radio stations are also standing at a crossroads as the fifth anniversary of the earthquake and tsunami approaches. In Miyagi Prefecture a station for the city of Kesenuma is aiming to shift to a community station next fiscal year, while a station for the town of Yamato is looking to remain a disaster-response station for another year.

Swans back in Fukushima

December 17, 2015

Return of swans a welcome sight in Fukushima town emptied by nuclear disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201512170001>



Two former Okuma town officials feed swans at the mouth of Kumagawa river in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, on Dec. 12. (Satoru Semba)

By YOSHITAKA ITO/ Staff Writer

OKUMA, Fukushima Prefecture--A flock of swans have returned to this coastal Fukushima town to pass the winter, **giving hope to residents who remain evacuated from Okuma** since the disaster unfurled at the nearby Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in 2011.

At the mouth of the Kumagawa River in Okuma, located just 3 kilometers from the crippled plant, 17 swans have made it their winter haven since late November.

A volunteer patrol group comprising retired Okuma town officials feed the idyllic birds as part of their daily routine in the hopes that their return will herald that of all the approximately 10,000 evacuated residents.

"It is comforting to see these birds returning to this town **as if nothing had happened here,**" said Tsunemitsu Yokoyama, 63, one of the six members of the group, which calls itself the "old men's squad." Dressed in protective suits, Yokoyama and another member of the group fed rice to the swans on Dec. 12 at the river's mouth. A number of large concrete blocks from a breakwater that was wrecked by the towering tsunami triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011, remain scattered about the area.

After the triple meltdowns at the nuclear plant, a large portion of the town, which co-hosts the crippled plant with Futaba, was designated as difficult-to-return zones, forcing all residents to scatter across the country.

"I wish the town could reward these birds with a resident certificate or something because they are eager to live here instead of all of us," said Yokoyama, the former chief of the town's disaster recovery section.

Evacuation & families living apart

December 18, 2015

40% of Fukushima evacuees have family living apart

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20151218_30.html

Dec. 18, 2015 - Updated 11:54 UTC+1

A government survey shows that about 40 percent of people who evacuated after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident had to live separately from their family members in the immediate aftermath of the disaster.

60,000 people in Fukushima Prefecture were surveyed between February and May last year. About 20,000 of them responded.

They were asked about their living conditions during the 50-day period following the accident.

The main reason for having to live apart was that family members were unable to evacuate because they had to help others. Some respondents said they were in different locations when they evacuated.

About 60 percent of the respondents said they stayed at 3 or more evacuation centers. Among them, about 20 percent said they stayed at 5 or more.

As for evacuation instructions issued on the first 2 days of the accident, roughly one in 4 respondents said they got none of the information.

About 30 percent said they did not undergo checks for radioactive contamination at the time of the evacuation.

Approximately 100,000 people are still forced to evacuate in Fukushima Prefecture.

There are concerns that prolonged evacuation and changing living environments may lead to physical problems for the evacuees.

On 3/11 emergency declaration reached only 16% of Fukushima residents

December 19, 2015

Only 16% of Fukushima residents knew of emergency declaration

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201512190021>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The government's declaration of a nuclear emergency on March 11, 2011, reached only 16.5 percent of residents in Fukushima Prefecture by the following day, according to a Cabinet Office survey. A key reason for this seems to have been that the communication structure in coastal areas was wiped out by the towering tsunami generated by the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake that led to the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The government directive was issued about four hours after the earthquake struck.

The survey findings on 19,535 evacuees from 22 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture underscore the difficulties in promptly notifying residents in such an emergency situation, which is essential for ensuring that all residents are evacuated smoothly.

The survey, the largest government-sponsored study on people evacuated in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster, was undertaken between February and May 2014.

The Cabinet Office said it was done in line with a law to use such data for mapping out extensive evacuation plans for nuclear accidents. It sent questionnaires to 59,378 people, and 19,535, or 32.9 percent of them, responded.

The central government issued the emergency declaration in Tokyo at 7:03 p.m. on March 11, 2011, approximately four hours after the earthquake hit. Only 16.5 percent of the respondents said they were informed of the declaration by the following day.

At 9:23 p.m. on March 11, the government also instructed all residents living within a 3-kilometer radius of the crippled plant to be evacuated and those living within 10 km of the facility to remain indoors. But only 15.6 percent and 18.8 percent of the respondents, respectively, said they knew of the instructions by March 12.

Among residents of the town of Namie, located within a 10-km radius of the plant, only 9.7 percent were informed of the emergency declaration by March 12.

The communication infrastructure in the coastal town was knocked out by the earthquake and tsunami, which also caused power blackouts in the area.

The government sequentially extended evacuation areas, and residents in a 20- to 30-km radius of the plant were instructed to remain sheltered indoors on March 15.

In another startling finding, only 63.2 percent of the respondents said they were informed of the March 15 instruction by the end of April--a full six weeks later--and 59.9 percent said they complied with the guidance.

The triple meltdown at the Fukushima plant led to the release of vast amounts of radioactive materials into the environment. After the disaster, local governments in areas surrounding nuclear plants around the country mapped out evacuation plans that call for residents living within a 30-km radius of a plant to remain sheltered until radiation readings reach a certain level.

The survey results show that local governments need to devise better systems to ensure that residents are promptly informed in times of emergency.

(This article was written by Shinichi Sekine, a staff writer, and Hisashi Hattori, a senior staff writer.)

50 billion yen bailout funds to be repaid

December 19, 2015

Farm, fishing cooperatives in disaster-hit Tohoku to repay ¥50 billion bailout funds in full

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/12/19/business/farm-fishing-cooperatives-in-disaster-hit-tohoku-to-repay-%C2%A550-billion-bailout-funds-in-full/#.VnZqh1IR-if>

JJI

Eight agricultural cooperatives in the three Tohoku prefectures that were hit hardest by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami now plan to repay in full ¥50 billion in bailout funds injected by the government and Norinchukin Bank after the disaster, informed sources said Saturday.

The cooperatives in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures will be able to start the repayment next month thanks to progress in their management reconstruction 4½ years on, the sources said.

Four months after the disaster, the government created a legal framework to enable struggling agricultural and fishery cooperatives in afflicted areas to receive capital injections under the preferred equity investment method without clarifying their management responsibilities and setting earnings targets.

In February-March 2012, the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Ministry and the Financial Services Agency approved fund injection requests from the most heavily damaged cooperatives while asking them to draw up management plans for four years through fiscal 2015.

If the farm organizations decided to remain recipients of funds from the government and Norinchukin, the central bank for agricultural cooperatives, they should have presented new management plans, the sources pointed out.

Nuclear Watch: Back on call

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/features/201512181222.html>

Back on call or the return of routine life

Video on the new Minamisariku hospital. Health care services are indispensable to full recovery of disaster-hit areas

Temporary housing & loneliness

December 20, 2015

Loneliness grows as 3/11 evacuees vacate temporary housing

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/12/20/national/loneliness-grows-311-evacuees-vacate-temporary-housing/#.VnZpKVIR-id>



Fukushima Minpo

Even though the tens of thousands of evacuees from the March 2011 earthquake, tsunami and ensuing Fukushima nuclear disaster are still living in temporary housing, many others have moved on, making virtual ghost towns out of once busy communities.

As of the end of November, 19,373 people were still in 16,403 temporary housing units in Fukushima, down from the peak of 33,016 people in July 2012. The disaster rescue law stipulates that residents can live in temporary housing for up to two years, but the prefecture extended that to March 2017.

But as more people move into new public housing or elsewhere, some 38 percent of the temporary housing units in Fukushima were vacant as of the end of November, up from 17 percent at the same time in 2013.

"It's lonely to celebrate the new year in a temporary housing community when residents move out one by one," said Masanori Takeuchi, 65, as he gazed intently at unlit units. Takeuchi heads a neighborhood council at a temporary housing community in Aizuwakamatsu.

When he moved in four years and five months ago, almost all 83 units were full. But now there are only about 40 people in 19 units, with five families planning to move in the spring.

As the vacancies grow, fewer people show up when Takeuchi and others hold barbecue parties and other events. When university volunteers throw get-togethers for the community, there are times when there are more staffers than residents.

"Worries that their neighbors will leave them could trigger mental illness," said an official with a prefecture-affiliated social welfare association.

According to the Cabinet Office, 11 people committed suicide in Fukushima between January and July this year, apparently due to the events of 3/11. Of those, two were residents of temporary housing.

The government of Fukushima is aware of the situation and has been struggling to hire enough staff to monitor their mental health and well-being. Fukushima wanted to hire 400 people for the job this fiscal year, but had only managed to fill 274 of the slots as of Dec. 1. One of the reasons is the lack of job security: The positions are offered on a one-year contract because the program is funded by central government subsidies given out each fiscal year.

“We have asked the government to revise the (subsidy program) but it’s going to be difficult,” said an official in Fukushima.

The temporary nature of the housing units is also a headache.

So far, **piling erosion** has been observed at 214 of the structures and **termite infestations** have been found in 128. Of those, 121 had both.

Normally, the piling that supports the foundation of a house is made of steel or concrete. But because temporary housing units are built to last for approximately two years, the piling is made of wood to shorten construction time and make them easier to disassemble.

The prefecture is planning to push the schedule forward for piling work by the end of March, but has yet to inform the residents of the details, residents say.

In addition, prefectural inspections have found 633 units **in need of repairs**, such as clogged roof gutters and other issues. Fukushima plans to fix the problems by the end of the month, but the prefecture is plagued by many other requests from residents, keeping them very busy.

“Until I can move to public housing, this is the only place for me to live,” said a woman in her 60s living in a temporary housing unit in Iwaki where a termite infestation was found. “I want it fixed right away.”

This section appears every third Monday and features topics and issues covered by the Fukushima Minpo, the largest newspaper in Fukushima Prefecture. The original article was published on Dec. 11.

Rice-cakes from this year's test harvest

December 21, 2015

Farmers make rice-cakes from test harvest

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20151221_17.html

Dec. 21, 2015 - Updated 06:42 UTC+1

The residents of an area still off limits since the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident have produced rice cakes from this year's test harvest.

The people of Minamisoma City's Odaka district are hoping the government's evacuation order will be lifted in April of next year. At the moment they are allowed to return to their homes, but only briefly.

Sunday's event was staged by farmers who are test-growing rice there as well as volunteers supporting the residents' upcoming return to the area.

They all gathered in front of the town's railway station and pounded about 30 kilograms of steaming rice into cakes.

The sound of mallets hitting the steamed rice echoed loudly along the street. The cakes were then seasoned and served to visitors.

The rice used in the event, like all rice shipped from Fukushima, had been cleared of radioactive

materials. But farmers don't sell their test crops.

A 5-year-old boy there with his parents said he loved rice cakes flavored with sugar and roasted soy-bean powder.

They later offered some rice cakes to a local shrine to give thanks for the harvest and to pray for a good yield next year.

One of the farmers, Koichi Nemoto, said the event made him happy and that he will continue to grow rice next year.

Forests won't be decontaminated (2)

December 22, 2015

Gov't plans not to decontaminate Fukushima forests away from residential areas

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20151222/p2a/00m/0na/012000c>

The Ministry of the Environment on Dec. 21 showed a panel of experts a policy of not decontaminating most of the forests in Fukushima Prefecture that are far from residential areas and where people do not usually enter.

The ministry came up with the policy because an increase in airborne radiation levels in residential areas brought on by the spread of radioactive materials has not been confirmed and because removing fallen leaves could have adverse effects such as the outflow of top soil. None of the panel members had objections over the policy, and the environment ministry is to revise its decontamination guidelines accordingly.

Forests account for 70 percent of Fukushima Prefecture's total area. The government was meant to remove fallen leaves and the like from forests within 20 meters from living areas as well as from areas where people routinely enter for activities such as mushroom cultivation and camping. But no decision had been made on what to do for other areas.

According to the ministry, in the areas where it plans not to decontaminate, about 80 percent of radioactive materials that adhered to leaves and branches at the time of the 2011 nuclear meltdowns have remained in surface soil and the spread of radioactive materials affecting airborne radiation levels in living areas has not been confirmed. Furthermore, the ministry said that any outflow of radioactive materials triggered by rainfall and other factors has not been confirmed.

Meanwhile, if accumulated fallen leaves and the like were to be removed from a wide area, it is feared to have adverse effects such as the outflow of top soil. Because of this, the ministry deemed it appropriate to prevent fallen leaves and top soil containing radioactive materials from flowing out by installing fences and sandbags rather than decontaminating forests. At the same time, the ministry will set out to revive forests. An environment ministry official in charge said, "It is difficult to decontaminate all of the forests and there could be adverse effects from such work. We have selected the best method for local people."

The environment ministry's plan has sparked criticism and anxiety among some local residents in Fukushima Prefecture, including those in forestry cooperatives and those who are trying to return to their hometowns.

The forestry cooperative in the Fukushima Prefecture village of Iitate, whose entire population has been evacuated, has demanded the government decontaminate the forests so that it could resume its business operations after the evacuation order is lifted. Forests account for 80 percent of the total area of the village. Forestry cooperative chief Chohei Sato, 64, said, "There are places where workers cannot enter because radiation levels are high. Unless they are decontaminated, we won't be able to engage in forestry like the way we did before the nuclear accident."

Under the government policy, on the other hand, the government is to call on foresters and other relevant people to maintain forests by doing such things as thinning in areas where airborne radiation levels are 2.5 microsieverts per hour or lower -- levels that do not require controlling of radiation exposure doses. That's because if weeds and the like grow in forests, they are expected to be effective in preventing radioactive soil from flowing out to living areas.

Kimio Akimoto, 68-year-old chief of the Futaba regional forestry cooperative, said, "Workers might not come here due to anxiety over radiation. If something happens to their health, it will be the cooperative that should take responsibility for that. We do not want the government to leave it solely in the hands of people on the spot."

The Fukushima Prefecture village of Katsurao located in a mountainous area in the Abukuma Highland is seeking to have the evacuation order lifted in the spring of 2016. A 77-year-old woman, who is thinking of cultivating vegetables in the village after the evacuation order is lifted, said, "I really want the government to decontaminate so that we can live without fear. But (forgoing decontamination) cannot be helped if time and money are needed. If that is the case, I want them instead to properly improve our living strongholds."

The government says it will install prevention fences and the like if the outflow of radioactive soil is feared to affect living areas. Hidenori Endo, 73, who serves as administrative head of the Shimokatsurao district in the Katsurao village, said, "I wonder if we can completely prevent the outflow of soil. There are limitations as mountains are extensive."

Removing "bright future" signs in Futaba

December 21, 2015

Removal work starts on 'bright future' pro-nuclear sign in evacuated Fukushima town

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201512210058>



Workers take down letters of a signboard promoting nuclear energy in Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture, on Dec. 21. (Yosuke Fukudome)

By MASAKAZU HONDA/ Staff Writer

FUTABA, Fukushima Prefecture--Workers removed lettering of a signboard that praises nuclear energy here on Dec. 21, despite opposition from the slogan writer who became an anti-nuclear activist after the Fukushima disaster emptied his hometown.

Two signboards in Futaba, including one that says, “Genshiryoku--Akarui Mirai no Energy” (Nuclear power is the energy of a bright future), became ironic symbols of the disaster at the nearby Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011. The other sign’s message is: “Genshiryoku--Kyodo no Hatten Yutakana Mirai” (Nuclear power will bring hometown development and an affluent future).

All residents of Futaba, which co-hosts the plant, were ordered to evacuate after the meltdowns.

The letters were removed from one signboard that stands over the town’s main street, which connects National Route No. 6 and JR Futaba Station.

The town assembly decided to remove the signs by the end of March 2016, citing “possible dangers of parts of the signs falling off due to dilapidation.”

However, Yuji Onuma, 39, who wrote the “bright future” slogan when he was a sixth-grader in Futaba, and others asked the town to keep signboards in place “for the sake of passing down the horrors of the nuclear accident and lessons learned from the accident to future generations.”

When the workers were taking down the letters, Onuma, who now lives in Koga, Ibaraki Prefecture, and his supporters held up panels saying, “Does removal mean reconstruction?” and “We cannot obliterate the past.”

The group had submitted to the Futaba government a petition signed by about 6,900 people from the town and elsewhere opposing the removal of the two signs.

Futaba Mayor Shiro Izawa has said the town will keep the signs “in a recoverable condition” at a warehouse, suggesting the possibility that the signs and their pro-nuclear slogans may later go on display at a new facility.

Iconic signs praising nuclear power taken down in town near Fukushima plant

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20151221/p2a/00m/0na/017000c>

FUTABA, Fukushima -- Removal of signs dating back around 25 years that praise nuclear energy began here on Dec. 21, with authorities having judged that the signs have overly deteriorated from age. After taking the signs down, the Futaba Municipal Government intends to preserve them as remembrances of the 2011 nuclear disaster.

Starting at around 10:30 a.m., workers carefully set about removing the two signs while confirming their state of damage. The work is planned to be finished by around early January. The signs will be stored temporarily in a warehouse on the town office premises.

The signs are located in a restricted area that is presently uninhabitable due to radiation danger from the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster. The municipal government had planned to dispose of the signs after taking them down.

One sign, which reads "Nuclear power: Energy for a bright future," was installed in 1988 along National Route 6 in front of the town gymnasium. The other, which reads "Nuclear power: A prosperous future and hometown development" was installed in 1991 near the entrance to the town office. Both signs were set up by the municipal government, which took applications from the public for pro-nuclear slogans in order to push for more nuclear reactors.

Thirty-nine-year-old Yuji Onuma, who thought of the slogan for the sign in front of the gymnasium as a child, however, argued that they should be kept in place as a memorial in order to show future generations the mistakes of the past.

In June of this year, Onuma submitted 6,902 signatures for his cause that had been collected from people including participants at anti-nuclear gatherings to the Futaba government. The municipal government has responded by considering a relocation of the signs to a park being planned by the prefectural government in Futaba and the adjacent town of Namie.

Following the disaster, Onuma, who grew up in Futaba, evacuated to Koga, Ibaraki Prefecture, where he has started a solar power business to help bring about a society free of nuclear power. He showed up to watch the beginning of the removal work on Dec. 21, commenting, "I'm very disappointed" that the signs were not being kept in place. He added, "To make sure we aren't manipulated by national policy again, I want them to be sure to put the signs on display after taking them down."

On Dec. 21, Futaba Mayor Shiro Izawa released a comment saying, "We will take down the signs due to their deterioration, but we will preserve them as the town's valuable property. Once Futaba has recovered, we are thinking of newly restoring and displaying the signs as disaster memorial."

Work begins to remove nuclear PR signboards

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Dec. 21, 2015 - Updated 11:14 UTC+1

Workers have begun to remove street signs promoting the benefits of atomic energy in a town in Fukushima Prefecture that hosts the crippled Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant.

Large signboards trumpeting atomic power were erected in Futaba Town in 1988 and 1991. The pro-nuclear signs were a symbol of the town.

The town was evacuated after the 2011 accident at the nuclear plant and residents are still unable to return. But the deteriorating signs are a hazard for people who make temporary visits to their houses.

Removal work began on Monday. Workers could be seen disassembling an overhead signboard that describes nuclear power as energy for a bright future.

But some people want the signs to remain.

Yuji Onuma submitted nuclear slogans to a town contest when he was a boy. He demonstrated against the signboards' removal on Monday with a placard calling for their preservation as historical artifacts. Nearly 7,000 people have signed a petition demanding the signs stay.

Onuma said the signboards should stay in place as a negative legacy of nuclear power, adding that he wants the town to use them to inform future generations.

The removal work is set to be completed on January 10th. Local authorities plan to display the signboards at an exhibit as an adverse symbol.

Fukushima lighting up again

December 24, 2015

Fukushima town lights up for evacuees' return

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201512240021>

By AKIFUMI NAGAHASHI/ Staff Writer

NARAHARA, Fukushima Prefecture--The first seasonal illuminations here since the Fukushima nuclear disaster are a signal that the town is lighting up again in more ways than one.

The Naraha town government is staging the event to offer a reason for evacuees to return home during the New Year holidays.

The **still largely deserted town's** display features trees and buildings adorned with 120,000 colorful LED bulbs in a park. The event started Dec. 21 and runs through Jan. 17.

An evacuation order that applied to most of the town following the disaster at the nearby Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011 was lifted on Sept. 5.

People have since started to return to their hometown, although **to date only around five percent of the local population has opted to go back.**

Fukushima: Record drop in population

December 24, 2015

Fukushima population sees record drop

Dec. 25, 2015 - Updated 04:53 UTC+1

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20151225_19.html

Japan's latest national census has found that the population of Fukushima Prefecture, home to the troubled nuclear power plant, has dropped by a record 5.7 percent since 2010.

The census was conducted in October and preliminary data were released on Friday. The census is held every 5 years, making this the first one since the March 2011 disaster hit northeastern Japan.

There were around 1.9 million people living in the prefecture as of October 1st. That's about 115,000 less than 5 years ago.

The population peaked at about 2.1 million in 1995 and has been falling since then.

The population of the Soso area of the prefecture fell by 42.9 percent. It contains restricted areas due to radioactive contamination from the nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant.

Meanwhile, the population of the Iwaki area, which has taken in many evacuees, grew by 2.1 percent.

Prefectural officials attribute the record drop in the population to residents who evacuated elsewhere following the nuclear accident. They say the area's aging population also played a role in the decline.

Population in Fukushima Pref. decreased by 110,000 in aftermath of nuke disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20151225/p2a/00m/0na/011000c>

The population of Fukushima Prefecture has decreased by approximately 110,000 since before the outbreak of the March 2011 nuclear crisis, according to preliminary figures for the 2015 Population Census.

The prefectural government attributes the decrease to the evacuation of residents out of the prefecture because of the nuclear crisis in addition to the declining birthrate and aging of the population.

According to the figures released on Dec. 25, the prefecture's population stood at 1,913,606 as of Oct. 1 this year, down 115,458, or 5.7 percent from 2,029,064 in the previous census conducted in 2010. It was the sharpest decrease in history and marked a postwar low.

By gender, there were 968,639 women in the prefecture, a decrease of 7.3 percent from the previous census, while the population of men came to 944,967, down 4 percent.

Regarding a gap in the percentage of the decrease between men and women, an official of the prefectural government said, "There are still many cases where women are evacuating in other prefectures with their children, fearing the effects of radiation, while leaving their husbands in Fukushima. Moreover, a massive number of male workers flowed into the prefecture for disaster recovery projects, such as decontamination work."

Twelve cities, towns and villages, where evacuation orders were issued in at least some areas following the disaster, saw their populations decline.

The population was zero in Okuma, Futaba, Tomioka and Namie -- four of six municipalities where evacuation orders are still effective in all areas. The population of Katsurao, where the municipal government is aiming to enable residents to return home by next spring, was 18. These people are currently residing in their homes in preparation for full-scale returns and have expressed their will to stay there for at least three months. The population of Iitate was 41, with these people choosing to stay at nursing care homes for the elderly in the town without evacuating to other areas.

The town of Naraha saw an 87.3 percent decline in its population from 7,700 in 2010 to 976 even though the evacuation order was lifted this past September.

The population of Kawauchi, where the evacuation order was lifted in some areas in October 2014, plummeted 28.3 percent from 2,820 to 2,021.

In contrast, municipalities in the prefecture that host many evacuees and workers engaged in disaster recovery work saw their populations increase from the pre-disaster period. The populations of Iwaki and Soma rose 2.1 percent and 2 percent, respectively. This is the first time in 20 years that these cities have seen increases in their populations.

Record drop in population plus gender gap

December 25, 2015

Fukushima's record decreasing rate of population causing gender gap, census shows

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201512250067>

By KENJI IZAWA/ Staff Writer

FUKUSHIMA--Fukushima Prefecture's population has declined by 5.7 percent since 2010, its largest recorded drop and the cause of a widening gender gap in some areas, according to national census figures announced on Dec. 25.

The population drop is mainly due to ongoing evacuations following the Fukushima nuclear disaster, according to the preliminary figures released by the prefectural government.

The prefecture lost 39,715 men and 75,743 women, a decrease of 4 percent and 7.3 percent from 2010, respectively. **The difference is thought to have been caused partly by the majority male presence in reconstruction efforts.**

A prefectural government official said the diminishing population is "attributable to a considerable number of people who have evacuated to places outside Fukushima Prefecture."

On the gap between the male and female populations in some municipalities, the official said, "I assume that most of the workers who relocate themselves to these municipalities for the purpose of carrying out work related to nuclear power plants and reconstruction efforts are male, but many of the evacuees are female."

The national census figures are the first released by the prefectural government since the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, which triggered the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Fukushima prefecture's population as of Oct. 1 stood at 1,913,606, down 115,458, or 5.7 percent, from the last census in 2010.

Among the six towns and villages where the entire population has left under evacuation orders, four towns recorded zero inhabitants: Okuma and Futaba, which co-host the nuclear plant, and nearby Tomioka and Namie.

The village of Katsurao had 18 people who have returned to their homes after being evacuated. They are recorded as temporary residents, but the central government is working to make their resettlement permanent. Katsurao's evacuation order is scheduled to be lifted next spring.

Naraha, where an evacuation order was lifted on Sept. 5, also experienced a massive decrease in its population, with 976 people living in the area, down 6,724 people, or 87.3 percent, from 2010. The figures illustrate the fact that few evacuees have opted to return home.

The town of Hirono, where a large portion of the population is involved in nuclear reactor decommissioning work, tallied a male population of 2,746, up 2.3 percent from 2010. The female population, on the other hand, was about half that figure at 1,577, down 42.3 percent.

The population figures are based on the number of people living in the prefecture as of Oct. 1, irrespective of whether they are registered as local citizens.

In areas where entry is restricted due to high levels of radiation from the nuclear accident, municipal employees and police officers were deployed to survey the population for the census.

Housing subsidies for voluntary evacuees

December 26, 2015

Fukushima to provide housing subsidy to voluntary nuclear evacuees in fiscal 2016

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20151226/p2a/00m/0na/016000c>

FUKUSHIMA -- Households that have voluntarily evacuated areas affected by the Fukushima nuclear crisis will be in line for up to 30,000 yen in monthly housing aid from the prefecture once its free housing program winds up at the end of fiscal 2016, officials said.

The **Fukushima Prefectural Government** currently provides housing with monthly rent of up to 90,000 yen to voluntary evacuee families with at least five members, and up to 60,000 yen to those with up to four members.

After the local body discontinues the program at the end of fiscal 2016, it will cover half a household's monthly rent up to 30,000 yen in the first year, and one-third up to 20,000 yen in the second year.

The amounts were determined based on the assumption that the families are paying 60,000 yen in rent per month, as the average rent for apartments in the prefecture is about 56,000 yen.

Additionally, the prefectural government will provide 100,000 yen in assistance to these households to help them cover key money when the rental contract is switched from the prefectural government to individual residents.

Among households that have evacuated within the prefecture, only those with children or expecting mothers will be eligible for the housing subsidies. The requirements will be eased for mothers who have evacuated with their children while leaving their husbands back at home.

Moreover, the prefectural government will also implement measures to make it easier for voluntary evacuees who are not covered by such subsidies to rent less expensive public housing.

The prefectural government estimates that there were some 7,000 households that were voluntarily taking shelter elsewhere in the prefecture or outside Fukushima as of the end of October, totaling about 18,000 people. Of them, more than 2,000 will be eligible for the subsidy system. The prefectural authorities expect the total bill to reach about 2 billion yen over the two-year period.

First association of Fukushima plaintiffs

December 27, 2015

Fukushima disaster plaintiffs to form association

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Dec. 27, 2015 - Updated 05:06 UTC+1

Japanese people who are suing the central government and an electric power utility over the Fukushima nuclear disaster will form their first association.

The move comes ahead of the 5th anniversary next March of the nuclear meltdowns.

Plaintiffs of class-action lawsuits living in and outside Fukushima are demanding compensation from the national government and Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO, in at least 18 prefectures.

The plaintiffs and lawyers from about 10 groups took part in a preparatory meeting in Tokyo earlier this month. They decided to **work together to prevent memories of the accident from fading away.**

The new group plans to call for stronger relief measures for residents. It intends to inaugurate in February and **aims to gather 10,000 members.**

The leader of one group, Yuya Kamoshita, says **radioactive contamination continues to pose a threat.** He says he wants to cooperate with others ahead of this turning point, 5 years after the accident.

Fukushima folktale calendar

December 27, 2015

Student evacuees from Fukushima village score big hit with local folktale calendar

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20151226/p2a/00m/0na/019000c>

Students from Iitate Junior High School in the village of Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture, are seen selling their picture story show-style calendar in the Nihonbashi district of Tokyo. (Mainichi)

A calendar featuring local folk stories and made by student evacuees from the village of Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture, is seeing brisk sales in Tokyo and other areas.

The picture story show-style calendar is the work of 34 second-year students at the village's municipal Iitate Junior High School, which currently has 100 students. The children were evacuated from Iitate following the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant meltdowns, and began studying at a temporary school in the city of Fukushima's Iino district. Most of the students began living in apartments around the city, and spend around one hour commuting to school in a bus owned by the Iitate government.

In an effort to pass down the village's culture, the school has a program known as "hometown study."

First-year students learn local practices such as the village rice-planting dance, while third-year students study traditional miso-making.

The second-year students, meanwhile, began crafting the calendar, which they based on two local folk stories told by an 81-year-old resident: "Ochiyo Jarui Myojin," which tells the tale of a snake that disguises itself as a young woman and repays a debt to a young hardworking person; and "Kasha Neko," or "Burning Cat," which recounts the friendship between a Buddhist priest at a mountain temple and an abandoned cat.

The 2016 calendar, which features scenes from the two stories, is available for 1,000 yen including tax.

Nine of the school's second-year students traveled to Tokyo as class representatives for a sales event held this month at a Fukushima prefectural antenna shop in the Nihonbashi district of Tokyo. There, they called out to passersby on the street, "Picture-story calendars for sale!"

This provided an opportunity for communication between residents of Tokyo and of the disaster-hit areas. One woman who bought a calendar, for example, thrust some sweets into the students' hands and said, "Here, eat these during your train ride home."

The Iitate Junior High School principal commented, "When people turn the pages of this calendar, I would be pleased if they turned their thoughts toward these students from the village of Iitate who have overcome hardships and become strong individuals."

Fukushima: Record drop in population (2)

December 28, 2015

Fukushima population at postwar low, down 5.7%, as nuclear disaster evacuees steer clear: census

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/12/28/national/fukushima-population-postwar-low-5-7-nuclear-disaster-evacuees-steer-clear-census/#.VoEQv1IR-id>

JJI

FUKUSHIMA – The population of Fukushima Prefecture fell by 115,458, or 5.7 percent, from 2010 to stand at 1,913,606 as of Oct. 1, marking the lowest level since the end of World War II, the prefecture has said.

The size of the drop, shown in a preliminary report on the census for 2015 released Friday, was the largest on record, due mainly to the evacuation of residents after the nuclear disaster at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s disaster-crippled Fukushima No. 1 plant in March 2011.

The population was zero in the towns of Okuma, Futaba, Tomioka and Namie, all of which were evacuated. The prefecture's population fell for the fourth consecutive time in the census, which is conducted every five years.

By municipality, the population plunged 87.3 percent to 976 in the town of Naraha, where the government's evacuation advisory was mostly lifted in September.

The population dropped 28.3 percent to 2,021 in the village of Kawauchi, where the evacuation advisory for its eastern part was removed in October 2014.

The figures indicate a lack of progress in the return of residents to the two municipalities.

By contrast, the population grew 0.6 to 2.1 percent in the cities of Fukushima, Iwaki and Soma, as well as the town of Miharu, as they accepted evacuees from areas close to the Tepco plant and workers involved in reconstruction-related projects, such as the decontamination of areas tainted by radioactive materials from the plant.

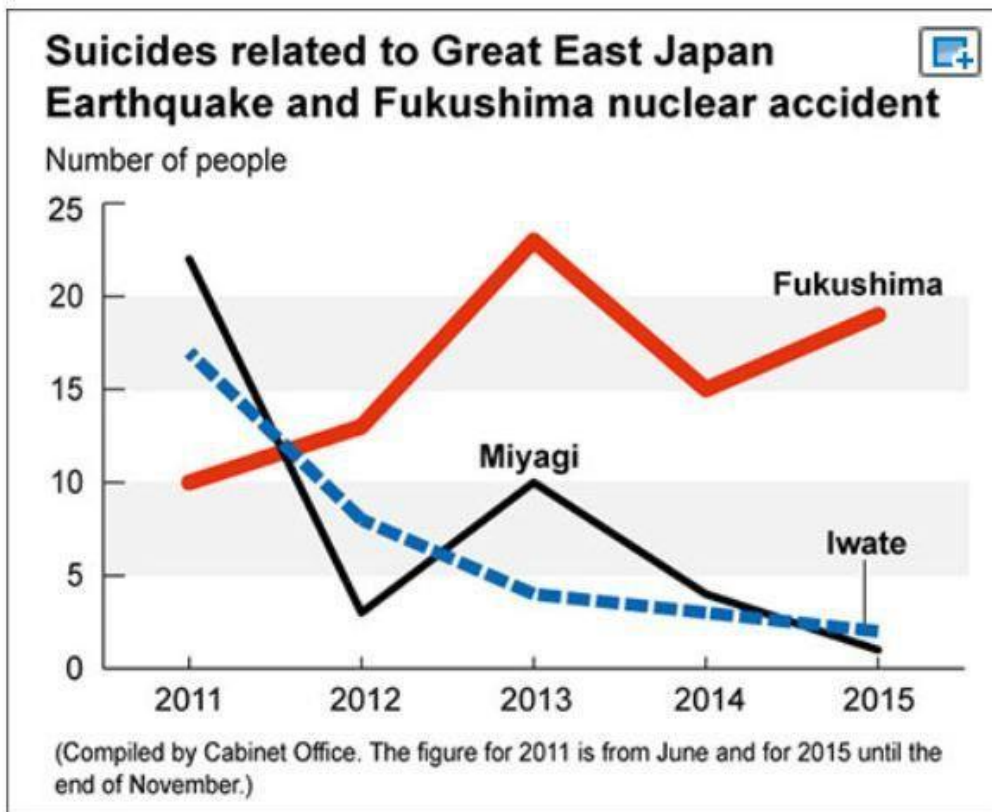
The number of households in Fukushima Prefecture rose 2.2 percent to 736,616, up for the 19th time in a row since the first census.

Surge in disaster-related suicides

December 28, 2015

Suicides rise among Fukushima nuclear disaster evacuees

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201512280026>



By MANA NAGANO/ Staff Writer

Disaster-related suicides in Fukushima Prefecture have surged this year, with prolonged evacuation from the nuclear accident and uncertainty about returning home or leading normal lives suspected as the main causes.

Nineteen suicides in Fukushima Prefecture from January to the end of November have been tied to the March 2011 triple disaster, up from 15 for all of last year, according to statistics compiled by the Cabinet Office.

Over the same period this year, one disaster-related suicide was recorded in Miyagi and two in Iwate, the two other prefectures that were most heavily damaged nearly five years ago by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

Local police determined if a suicide was related to the disaster and subsequent evacuation after talking to bereaved family members.

Suicide statistics in the three prefectures compiled since June 2011 showed that the situation among evacuees is much more despondent in Fukushima Prefecture than in Iwate and Miyagi prefectures, according to the Cabinet Office section in charge of dealing with suicides.

So far, a total of 154 suicides have been linked to the disaster in the three prefectures until the end of November 2015. More than half of the deaths were people who lived in Fukushima Prefecture before the disaster struck.

Between June and December 2011, the suicide numbers were 22 in Miyagi Prefecture and 17 in Iwate Prefecture. Fukushima Prefecture recorded 10 in that period.

However, the numbers for Iwate and Miyagi prefectures have subsequently declined while the figure for Fukushima Prefecture has been at least 10 a year.

Many disaster victims in Iwate and Miyagi prefectures have been able to return to their hometowns to lead comparatively normal lives.

But evacuation orders remain for six municipalities in the vicinity of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant and parts of three other local governments in the prefecture.

As of November, about 24,000 people in Iwate and about 55,000 in Miyagi were living in temporary housing away from their homes. In Fukushima, the number was about 103,000.

"The problems facing Fukushima disaster victims become more complicated as time passes," said Masaharu Maeda, a professor of disaster psychiatry at Fukushima Medical University.

He pointed to differences among evacuees from areas where evacuation orders have been lifted.

"The elderly may return to their homes, but the generation who are still raising children do not return, meaning families are torn apart," Maeda said. "There is a need to increase the number of people who have specialized knowledge to help provide support to disaster victims through improved care."

Cabinet Office officials conducted a survey on the reasons for 80 suicides in Fukushima that were identified as disaster-related by police, who talked to bereaved family members.

The most common cause was health problems, found in 42 cases, followed by economic and lifestyle woes for 16 people and family problems for 14. In some cases, more than one motive was included.

The central government is considering lifting the evacuation order by March 2017 for districts near the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant where residents are allowed to enter during the day.

But there is no indication when the evacuation order will be lifted for the remaining seven municipalities where airborne radiation levels are still high.

In 2014, the Fukushima Medical University conducted a survey of about 38,000 evacuees from areas where the evacuation order remains in place.

Close to 40 percent of respondents said they were concerned about the negative health effects in the future from exposure to radiation. Nearly 50 percent said they felt the radiation would have a negative impact on their children and grandchildren.

People concerned about radiation were more likely to suffer from depression, the survey showed.

Disaster victims in Fukushima were also found to be more likely to suffer from depression or post-traumatic stress disorders than people in Miyagi and Iwate prefectures.

Returning photos to tsunami survivors

December 29, 2015

Restoring memories: Volunteers return thousands of photos to tsunami survivors

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201512290008>



The digitally restored photo of Kumi Hoshi's son and her niece. Isao Matsumura, a volunteer in Kawachinagano, Osaka Prefecture, worked on the photo using image editing software. (Provided by Kumi Hoshi)

By YOSUKE AKAI/ Staff Writer

KOBE--It's a typical family photo, sentimental but nothing to rave about ordinarily, that was assumed lost forever in the devastation in northeastern Japan caused by the 2011 tsunami disaster.

And indeed, the photo, badly damaged, would have vanished for good were it not recovered from the mud and digitally restored by a volunteer group in Kobe.

"I didn't even look at the photo very often when I took it for granted that it was always there," said Kumi Hoshi, 58, referring to the shot taken more than 20 years ago of her son and her niece together at her parents' home in Minami-Sanriku, Miyagi Prefecture, which was destroyed in the disaster triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake. "I now treasure the photo. I did not expect it to be restored to this level."

So if a picture is really worth one thousand words, then the 25,982 photos digitally restored by "Anata no Omoide Mamoritai" (Unit working to protect your memory) would fill a good-sized book.

The last batch of photos was returned to their owners on Oct. 29.

Kayoko Naito, a 57-year-old homemaker in Takahagi, Ibaraki Prefecture, who helped to restore the final photo with image editing software said she found the experience rewarding.

Even though she lives far from the epicenter of the magnitude-9.0 offshore earthquake that hit the Tohoku region on March 11, 2011, her home shook violently.

Her parents, as well as her parents in-law, live in Fukushima Prefecture, which experienced its own disaster when the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant went into triple meltdown because of the earthquake and tsunami.

Three relatives died in the tsunami or during evacuation. Overall, about 18,500 people died or remained unaccounted for in the quake and tsunami.

“(Through this project), I felt I was contributing in some small way to the relief effort,” Naito said. “Helping to restore damaged photos was a catharsis for me.”

The project to restore the damaged photos was the brainchild of Nobue Funaki, 38, an associate professor of disaster management and social services at Kobe Gakuin University. She proposed the initiative as something that could be accomplished “even at a location far from the stricken region.”

The project’s secretariat is based in her university, which does a course on preparedness for a natural disaster. The program was born out of a lesson the university learned after Kobe and surrounding areas were struck by the Great Hanshin Earthquake in 1995, leaving 6,434 people dead.

The project kicked off in April 2011, with Tohoku Fukushi University in Sendai and Kogakuin University in Tokyo joining it.

Within a year, it had received 54,000 or so photos after fliers were handed out at evacuation shelters across the Tohoku region announcing the restoration effort.

The project team accepted 25,982 photos to restore with image editing software.

Those that were too damaged to restore or which retained a decent image after mud and oil were wiped away were excluded.

Hoshi, who lives in temporary housing in Tome, Miyagi Prefecture, was impressed by the group’s efforts. All of her relatives survived the tsunami that swallowed her home and that of her parents in the coastal town of Minami-Sanriku.

After her family’s mud-covered photo album was discovered near where her home had stood, she sent it to the photo restoration group.

Volunteers downloaded the scanned images so they could work on their assignments.

Each image was assigned a six-digit number, instead of the photo owner’s name, for privacy reasons.

After completing the digital restoration, the original image data was deleted.

About 300 volunteers participated in the project, not only from across Japan, but even from overseas, in response to an online call by the project secretariat.

“I was surprised to find that so many people wanted to get involved since they could not go to the affected area due to a lack of time or money, or for health reasons,” said Yuka Madokoro, 38, at the project secretariat. “The restored photos are the fruits of their efforts, time and dedication.”

Hoshi’s photo was restored by Isao Matsumura, who is 74 and lives in Kawachinagano, Osaka Prefecture. Watching TV footage of communities devastated by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami reminded him of scenes he saw from his office 20 years ago.

He recalled watching helplessly as plumes of black smoke rose over Kobe across Osaka Bay after the Great Hanshin Earthquake.

“I am too old now to go and do something in the stricken area (in Tohoku),” said Matsumura. “But I have been hoping to do something this time.”

"Miracle pine" seedling in Izumo Taisha shrine

December 31, 2015

Seedling from lone pine that survived 2011 tsunami headed to Izumo Taisha

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201512310009>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

A seedling from the "miracle" pine tree in Iwate Prefecture that survived the 2011 tsunami will be planted at Izumo Taisha grand shrine in Shimane Prefecture in March 2016, the fifth anniversary of the disaster.

"I want the seedling to become a symbol that leads people to keep the disaster in mind," said Yoshihiro Oyama, 64, operator of a gardening company in Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture, who led the effort to raise the seedling and donate it to the famed Shinto shrine.

Oyama also serves as a vice director of a nonprofit organization that was engaged in preserving the scenic Takata Matsubara pine forest, which stretched two kilometers along the coast in Rikuzentakata before the disaster.

When the tsunami spawned by the Great East Japan Earthquake engulfed the coast on March 11, 2011, the pine was the only survivor among about 70,000 pine trees there. Oyama learned of its existence 12 days later.

Oyama and other members of his group, "Association for the Preservation of Takata Matsubara," went to the pine every day to try to save it. Members built a fence around it to protect it from seawater. They also resupplied fuel to machinery that was removing groundwater mixed with the briny water.

In May 2011, Oyama found that two branches, which had been about 20 meters above the ground, had fallen apparently due to the wind. He brought them to his home, made seven scions, each about four centimeters long, from them and grafted them on rootstocks of black pine trees.

Of the seven, two grew. Oyama asked popular comic artist Takashi Yanase (1919-2013) to name one because he had given names to four other seedlings grown by the Forestry and Forest Products Research Institute in Iwate Prefecture in a similar fashion.

Agreeing to the request, Yanase named it "Kenage" (admirable). Another person named the other one "Sora" (sky).

Oyama asked a Kyoto Prefecture-based group that was engaged in rehabilitating coastal forests for suggestions on where to plant the two seedlings. At that time, he told the group, "We want to plant them in places that are not likely to be hit by tsunami."

Based on advice from the group, named "Hakusa Seisho no Kai" (Group of white sands and blue pine trees), Oyama and other members of his group chose Izumo Taisha grand shrine as it is known for its "Matsu no Sando" (approach where pine trees are lined). In addition, the shrine attracts worshippers from throughout the country.

In October this year, Oyama's group offered to donate a seedling from the miracle pine to Izumo Taisha. Shrine officials accepted the request.

According to the Iwate prefectural government, 1,602 people died and more than 200 people remain missing in Rikuzentakata due to the tsunami and related causes. Oyama also lost many of his acquaintances in the disaster, including the then chairman of his group.

"The branches, which led to the seedlings, were presents from the miraculous pine tree that provides us with the spirit to live," Oyama said.

Oyama's group will dedicate the Kenage seedling, which has grown to a height of about one meter, to Izumo Taisha. It will be planted near the Matsu no Sando approach on March 19.

Right to vote "a pillar of basic human rights"

December 31, 2015

INSIGHT: Communities displaced by 2011 disaster deprived of rights to vote, live

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/column/AJ201512310001>

By TOSHIHIDE UEDA/ Senior Staff Writer

In the lead-up to the fifth winter since the 2011 disasters, a man from Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, was speaking into a microphone at the side of Hachiko, the iconic statue of the faithful dog, in front of Tokyo's Shibuya Station.

"I am giving this stump speech here because I don't quite understand," said Keizo Oguro, who was running in the Namie mayoral election, on Nov. 9.

Oguro, 59, a former chairman of the Namie town assembly, was canvassing for votes from residents of his town who had evacuated from the nuclear accident. He was unsuccessful in his bid on Nov. 15.

Namie is located to the north of Futaba and Okuma, the two towns that co-host the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. With some 21,000 residents, Namie was also hit hard by a towering tsunami and the nuclear disaster in the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 2011.

The quake and tsunami took the lives of 559 townspeople, including "associated deaths" and other causes, according to prefectural government figures as of Dec. 14. That death toll is the second highest among all municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture.

In addition, the whole of Namie was designated an evacuation zone following the nuclear disaster. The town remains "entirely evacuated," the town government office and all.

What did Oguro have in mind when he said in front of Hachiko that he didn't "quite understand"?

"I don't quite understand where our eligible voters are," he said. "The future and the survival of our town hinge on this mayoral election. I want to talk about key policies before voters, but I have few opportunities to talk about most of the issues. Elections, which are about the ABCs of democracy, are at risk."

What exactly did Oguro mean?

'FOUNDATION OF DEMOCRACY'

The quake, tsunami and nuclear disaster sent Fukushima residents scattered across all 47 prefectures. More than 100,000 people remain evacuated, with nearly 44,000 living outside Fukushima Prefecture. Namie is no exception. Its townspeople are dispersed across 45 prefectures, with more than 14,500 of them living in Fukushima Prefecture and more than 6,400 living outside of it, according to town officials. It has some 900 "townspeople" in Tokyo.

But Oguro said only about 3,300 of them, who live in temporary housing and public housing for disaster survivors, can be located.

"You have a vague idea of the footsteps of the rest, but you can never locate them exactly," he said.

Residents' addresses are part of personal information, which is not for disclosure. Oguro said half of the postal matter he sent to old addresses were returned to him on account of "address unknown."

While the townspeople are spread across the country, the number of posting areas for candidates' posters dwindled from the pre-disaster count of 89 to only 10 after the disaster. That is because all voting districts, of which there used to be 17 across the town, were unified following the disaster.

The Public Offices Election Law stipulates there should be between five and 10 posting areas per voting district. The number of polling stations also fell from 17 before the disaster to only eight.

Officials of Namie's election administration committee said the voting districts were unified to "allow the townspeople, who are now scattered, to vote at whichever polling station they may visit." The measure was therefore likely taken out of goodwill.

But temporary housing units within Fukushima Prefecture alone are spread across a total of 31 locations in seven municipalities. Most of the townspeople can no longer even get a look at posters of candidates in their own neighborhoods.

"The nuclear disaster not only spewed radioactive substances but also blew off the foundation of democracy," Oguro said.

The voter turnout rate during the latest mayoral election stood at 56.05 percent, down from 73.51 percent eight years ago, the previous time voting was held.

The right to vote is a pillar of basic human rights. That right is being compromised.

NO BLUEPRINTS FOR LIVING

The urbanized section of Otsuchi, Iwate Prefecture, a town along the Sanriku coast, was destroyed by the gigantic tsunami spawned by the Great East Japan Earthquake. It left nearly 1,300 of the town's 16,000 or so residents dead or missing.

Ruriko Suzuki, a professor with the Iwate College of Nursing, lived in this town, where she served as a public health nurse for 28 years. Suzuki, 67, is now working hard to have a facility built in Otsuchi for keeping an eye on, and looking after, the town's elderly population.

Article 25 of the Japanese Constitution stipulates the right to live, another pillar of basic human rights.

"All people shall have the right to maintain the minimum standards of wholesome and cultured living," the article says. "In all spheres of life, the state shall use its endeavors for the promotion and extension of social welfare and security, and of public health."

Public health nurses have taken it upon themselves to face the residents of their communities and stand at the forefront of defending public health.

"The role of us public health nurses is to take care of an entire community," Suzuki said. "It is so important to offer prospects for the future of each community. But we are not in a position to do that. With no fixed residence, people cannot draw up blueprints for living."

Some 3,000 of Otsuchi's population continue to live in temporary housing units within the town, whereas another 3,000 remain evacuated outside Otsuchi, according to the town's figures.

"A word or two uttered by an acquaintance can give you the motivation to continue to live, but that is not available, either," said Suzuki, who is hoping to open a facility that would provide that kind of motivation.

* * *

New foundations

January 1, 2016

Photo Journal: Family foundations

January 1, 2016 (Mainichi Japan)

Japanese version



<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160101/p2a/00m/0na/004000c>

A family gathers in the town of Naraha, Fukushima Prefecture, spending the New Year there for the first time in five years after the area was evacuated due to the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster. The town's evacuation order was lifted in September last year. Behind the family are the foundations of their new house, after they took down their old house that had fallen into disrepair while they were living in evacuation. (Mainichi)

Emperor pained by evacuees' plea

January 1, 2015

Emperor speaks of 'pain' over Tohoku evacuees still living in temporary homes

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/01/01/national/emperor-speaks-pain-tohoku-evacuees-still-living-temporary-homes/#.Vobq_1IR-id

Kyodo

Emperor Akihito on Friday expressed his hope for the reconstruction of Tohoku as 2016 marks five years since a massive earthquake and tsunami wrecked towns, villages and farmland across the region.

"It pains me to think that there are still people who cannot return to the places they used to live and those who must endure the hardships of living in temporary housing," the Emperor said in his New Year's message to the nation.

"I hope that these people will take good care of their health through the cold winter, and that further progress will be made in the recovery of the afflicted areas," he said. "We are prone to natural disasters. It

is my sincere hope that each and every Japanese cultivate an awareness of disaster prevention and continue to look out for each other and be prepared to protect themselves at all times,” the Emperor added.

The Emperor and Empress Michiko have repeatedly visited and met with disaster victims in the prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima. The Imperial Couple are expected to attend a government-sponsored memorial service on March 11, the day the quake struck, as they have done every year since 2011.

In his message, the Emperor also reflected on the fact that 2015 marked 70 years since the end of World War II. “It was a year in which many of us spent much time thinking about the war. In welcoming the new year, I would like to renew my prayer for peace both for our country and our people.”

Over 100,000 still displaced from Fukushima

January 1, 2015

100,000 still displaced 5 yrs after nuclear crisis

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Jan. 1, 2016 - Updated 20:20 UTC

More than 100,000 former residents of Fukushima Prefecture are still living away from their homes nearly 5 years after a nuclear accident forced them to flee.

Three municipalities are expecting the lifting of evacuation orders for their residents by the spring of this year. But whether many of them will return is unclear due to fears of radiation and unstable livelihoods.

The government's evacuation order is still in place for 9 Fukushima municipalities. 57,000 people are living elsewhere within the prefecture, while 43,000 of them are living outside the prefecture.

Minamisoma City, Kawamata Town and Katsurao Village expect the lifting of orders in some districts still designated as evacuation zones.

But convincing people to return is expected to be difficult. In the case of Naraha Town where the evacuation order was lifted in last September, only 5 percent of residents have so far returned. They cite radiation fears, insufficient medical service and other reasons.

In Fukushima prefecture, the building of the intermediate storage facilities for contaminated soil and other wastes is crucial. But only 22 of some 2,300 landowners have signed land sales contracts.

View from inside Fukushima Pref.

This article dates a bit (last July) but things haven't changed that much since at Fukushima.

View from Inside Fukushima Prefecture: Vastly Different from Govt. Pronouncements

<http://fukushimaupdate.com/view-from-inside-fukushima-prefecture-vastly-different-from-govt-pronouncements/>

July 9, 2015

translation services

by Robert Hunziker / ukprogressive.co.uk / July 8, 2015 /

Because of Japan's unconscionable open-ended new secrecy law, it is very likely journalism in the nation has turned tail, scared of its own shadow. Nevertheless, glimmers of what has happened, of what is happening, do surface when brave people come forward.

On May 22nd 2015 Hiromichi Ugaya, a photojournalist who is well-informed, insightful, and engaging, was interviewed about what he witnessed in the aftermath of one of the world's most horrendous disasters. Hiromichi Ugaya was born in Kyoto City, Japan in 1963. He is an accomplished photojournalist with experience in both Japan and the United States, receiving his bachelor's degree at Kyoto National University and his master's degree at Columbia University.

Naïveté of Public

Hiromichi first visited Fukushima within two weeks of the disaster, and he has returned nearly 50 times to photograph scenes. His is a personal mission because the tragedy does not receive adequate media coverage. According to him, very few journalists cover the aftermath; television in Japan has lost interest; the public is blasé and dangerously naïve; Japanese publishers do not entertain stories about Fukushima, and the mainstream media in Japan ignores the impact of the aftermath.

Curiously, it's as if a news blackout has been covertly instituted, and maybe it has. What people do not see, do not hear becomes invisible, out of sight out of mind, similar to the after-effects of radiation exposure, which are not felt, not smelled, not tasted, not physically recognized by people, until it's too late, until it's too late.

Then again, maybe The Act on the Protection of Specially Designated Secrets, Act No. 108 promulgated on December 13, 2013 is quelling public opinion?

According to a leading Japanese newspaper, the law "almost limitlessly widens the range of what can be considered confidential," and the new secrecy law allows bureaucrats and politicians to "designate state secrets to their liking," Nobuyuki Sugiura, Managing Editor, Tokyo Head Office, *Asahi Shimbun* will continue to respond to the public's right to know, *The Asahi Shimbun*, December 7, 2013.

Those who leak state secrets face up to 10 years in prison.

And, repeating that standardized rule: Bureaucrats and politicians can "designate state secrets to their liking." Is this a world's first? Does this mean that bureaucrats and politicians can determine the fate of anybody and/or everything?

In the face of cowardly authoritarianism, history teaches lessons of harsh reality, for example, Chernobyl is an example of the long-term tragedy associated with nuclear accidents, thirty years later, nearly one million dead (source: Alexey V. Yablokov, Center for Russian Environmental Policy, Moscow, *Chernobyl: Consequences of the Catastrophe for People and the Environment*, The New York Academy of Sciences, Vol. 1181, December 2009).

Chronicling the first four years of Fukushima, Hiromichi Ugaya composed a photo book about the tragedy as a personal countermeasure to widespread public apathy: *Portrait of Fukushima: 2011-2015: Life After Meltdown*, which is a treasure trove of over 200 unpublished photos, telling the story from the beginning to the present.

Regions of Fukushima persist ghostlike: "America Tonight journeyed to the affected areas, which are separated into zones of higher and lower radiation risk. In the hardest-hit area, known as the "exclusion zone," the streets remain virtually empty, eerily silent and frozen in time at the moment residents fled the quaking earth and incoming sea. The garbage and debris that litter the area defy the kempt and pristine neighborhoods for which Japan is famous," Michael Okwu, *Inside Fukushima's Ghost Towns*, Aljazeera America, Jan.6, 2014.

An Insider's Story- the interview

The government's initial reaction to the disaster is scandalous. According to Hiromichi, the authorities should have been "more open to the public." Because of failure to communicate the danger, unnecessary radiation exposure was widespread. Minimal information was provided and evacuations were delayed much too long.

In essence, he believes the authorities were probably concerned about public panic. Regrettably, that concern may serve to haunt and endanger lives for many years. For example: "The most serious leakage of radiation took place March 15th, which was day-five of the nuclear accident, but still, within the radius of 10-20 kilometers, many citizens were still there... They were exposed to the radiation. The number of the people who got exposed to the radiation comes up to like 230,000, which is ten times bigger than Three Mile Island of 1979. So, it's huge and all the population on Fukushima, two million, have to go for medical checks every year."

Hiromichi suspects an outbreak of thyroid cancer over the next few years. Already, according to local reports, 107 cases of thyroid cancer have been confirmed. Yet, the gestation period for radiation's effect is 5-40 years. And, this is only the fourth year.

He believes the Japanese people are not well informed. They only see the limited thyroid cancer cases so far even though those are merely an early harbinger, only foreshadowing the beginning of a long process of widespread complications for years to come. As well, it is doubtful people want to face the brutal truth; avoidance is an easy way out when fear reigns supreme.

Additionally, it is likely that widespread health problems will occur well beyond the limits of Fukushima Prefecture. The radioactive plume traveled notably beyond the immediate area. In March, in the immediate aftermath of the explosions, the plume traveled to Tokyo. "The area between Fukushima and Tokyo has some huge hotspots. In the northern Tokyo metropolitan area, also huge hotspots. Over the eastern region of Japan, the radioactive plume spread across a huge area."

Hiromichi met with families of Fukushima Prefecture. The accident triggered bizarre behavior amongst families and within communities. The first reaction of family members was to evacuate their children to the next prefectures. But, complications arose, for example, "The problem happened because... first fathers tried to evacuate with their families... in those places where the evacuees reached, the fathers could not find a job. So, the fathers went back to their hometowns to their former jobs although the hometown was contaminated."

The families of Fukushima squabbled and divided over issues of whether to leave their homes, sometimes leaving behind stubborn family members who refused to leave their lifetime residence. As well, entire communities divided into camps of pro-evacuation versus anti-evacuation, leading to conflict, arguments with old friends labeled as traitors.

Along the way, people experience horrible depression, drinking problems, headaches, vomiting, and loss of appetite, symptoms which are outside of physical normality.

Hiromichi's story leaves one dangling, wondering what's to become of the tens of thousands who are homeless to this day, what happens to those who live in fear, to the depressed who now view life as meaningless. And, to those who have already returned to fringe areas.

His is the inside story, the bitter truth behind the recklessness inherent within the complexity of nuclear power generation, toying with enormous untamed power, like wild horses on the plains, originated from $e=mc^2$.

Still, to this day, purportedly, “More people have died from stress-related causes than from the initial disasters in Fukushima,” Alexis Dudden, professor of history, University of Connecticut, *The Fourth Winter of Fukushima*, Truthout, Jan. 4, 2015.

Beyond that, as time marches on, it is almost certain to bring on a perniciousness of cancer-related complications of unconscionable consequence, look at Chernobyl (1986) where to this day, in the still-contaminated villages and towns of Ukraine and Belarus children are horribly deformed without torsos and babies genetically mutated born without thighs or without fingers and where the “Chernobyl necklace” or thyroid cancer is universally widespread (Source: John Vidal, *Nuclear’s Green Cheerleaders Forget Chernobyl at Our Peril*, The Guardian, April 1, 2011). It’s 30 years later, and it continues!

The Health Impact

Green Cross International, which is committed to phasing out nuclear energy worldwide, issued a report d/d March 9, 2015: *Fukushima Daiichi Power Plant Disaster: How many people were affected? 2015 Report*. According to Adam Koniuszewski, Chief Operating Office of Green Cross International: “Our local presence and ongoing activities to help the communities... gives us a first-hand experience of the human and environmental consequences of nuclear disasters.”

Mikhail Gorbachev, former Communist Party General Secretary, formed Green Cross International in 1993. According to the former Soviet Union President and Nobel Peace Prize laureate: “We are facing a global environmental crisis, a conflict between man and nature,” Alexei Yablokov, *Heroes of the Environment*, Time Magazine, October 17, 2007. Chernobyl happened on his watch.

Estimates of radiation fallout, as obtained by Green Cross Int’l, show that 80% of the released radiation was deposited in the ocean and the other 20% dispersed within a 50 km radius. Over time, the overall risk of cancer will increase, especially for children at risk for entire lifetimes.

“Approximately 32 million people in Japan are affected by the radioactive fallout from the nuclear disaster in Fukushima.”

“The number of deaths from the nuclear disaster attributed to stress, fatigue and hardship of living as evacuees is estimated to be around 1,700 so far.”

So it goes, the long reach of radiation exposure is only starting as the gestation period runs 5-to-40 years. Not only that but the Fukushima Power Plant is still white hot, very hot. Despairingly, the melted core is somewhere inside of or outside of the nuclear containment vessels, nobody knows where, an enormous problem riddled with unforeseen danger for the environment, for humanity, maybe forever.

Why is Japan brazenly restarting nuclear power plants in the face of Fukushima’s continuing calamity, a tragedy that has only just started?

SOURCE: UK Progressive

Ugaya Hirochimi

<http://queenmobs.com/2015/06/an-interview-with-hiromichi-ugaya-a-photojournalist-documenting-fukushima/>

A 25-minute interview (in English) with Ugaya Hirochimi, a photojournalist who has visited Fukushima many times since the disaster. <https://youtu.be/EbUUhk4uoAc>

Ugaya has also published a book of photographs, to try and fight the growing oblivion surrounding the aftermath of 3/11:

***Portrait of Fukushima: 2011-2015: Life After Meltdown* can be purchased here.**

Forest decontamination not sufficient

January 4, 2015

Fukushima asks govt. for forest decontamination

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Jan. 4, 2016 - Updated 11:47 UTC+1

Officials from Japan's Fukushima Prefecture and its municipalities have called on the central government to extend decontamination work deeper into forests.

They made the request to Environment Minister Tamayo Marukawa in Tokyo on Monday.

The government has placed an in-principle limit on the clean-up of radioactive substances from the 2011 nuclear accident to areas up to 20 meters of communities. It says it doesn't plan to go beyond that as it has no confirmation that hazardous radioactive matter has scattered further.

Toshiyuki Hata, deputy governor of Fukushima Prefecture, called on the government to review its plan and look at ways to clean up entire forests. He cited the concerns of residents who are eager to return home, and workers in the forestry industry.

Minister Marukawa said only that the government will continue to hear the opinions of local communities.

The deputy governor said after the meeting that many people are worried about the situation as their homes are surrounded by forests.

Preserving tradition in Fukushima

January 4, 2015

Fukushima ladder-top acrobatics

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20160104_20.html

Jan. 4, 2016 - Updated 08:06 UTC+1

Traditional ladder-top stunts have entertained visitors at a shrine in Minamisoma City, Fukushima Prefecture.

Youths including construction workers took turns performing acrobatic stunts atop a 6-meter ladder on Monday, the first working day of the year.

The New Year's ritual has been held annually at the shrine to pray for good health and safety at work.

Since the 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster, the event has also been held to pray for recovery.

The shrine is located in an evacuation zone established after the nuclear accident. Residents can stay temporarily in the zone.

The Minamisoma municipal office is hoping the evacuation order will be lifted in April.

One performer said he wants to join this local traditional event again with hopes the area quickly recovers.

Coming of age in Fukushima

January 3, 2015

Fukushima evacuees hold 'Coming of Age' ceremony

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20160103_17.html

Jan. 3, 2016 - Updated 18:40 UTC+1

Young people who fled their hometown near the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant 5 years ago have attended a "Coming of Age" ceremony. Japanese are legally considered adults when they turn 20.

The residents of Futaba Town were forced to evacuate, and many of them are now living in Iwaki City in the southeastern part of Fukushima Prefecture.

Sixty-three new adults, including evacuees who are now living outside the prefecture, attended Sunday's ceremony in Iwaki.

Futaba Mayor Shiro Izawa handed them certificates and asked them to work for the reconstruction of

their hometown.

Keiichiro Sakai and Emi Nishimaki represented the new adults. **They pledged that they will never forget Futaba and will contribute to the region, even though they have been separated by the disaster.** They also said they will keep trying to achieve their dreams.

For some of the participants, it was their first reunion since the 2011 disaster.

In sympathy with Fukushima people

January 7, 2016

NUCLEAR CONNECTION: Nagasaki festival to feature float using wood from Fukushima

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201601070003>

By SHOKO RIKIMARU/ Staff Writer

NAGASAKI--To offer encouragement to a Fukushima community displaced by the nuclear crisis, the famed Nagasaki Kunchi autumn festival here will use wood from the hard-hit Kawauchi village for its "kokkodesho" drum float.

A group of Nagasaki residents are currently working to manufacture the symbolic drum float with hinoki cypress logs and boards from Kawauchi, so that it can debut in the festival parade in 2018.

Keizo Imura, a 69-year-old retired firefighter in Nagasaki, came up with the idea of using logs from the village, part of which was designated as a mandatory evacuation zone in the wake of the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in 2011.

Following the triple meltdown at the plant, triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, the village's population has halved to about 1,600 people today.

"We earnestly hope that the village will recover from the disaster to allow many residents to return home when this float is donated for the festival (in 2018)," Imura said.

During the Nagasaki Kunchi festival, local communities in Nagasaki city take turns in hosting the dedicative performance at Suwajinja shrine each year. In the climax, about 40 men hoist and toss up and down the kokkodesho float, which is heavy as one ton.

After the nuclear disaster unfurled, forcing Fukushima residents to evacuate, Imura felt special sympathy for the displaced people, in part, because his parents and four siblings all suffered from the U.S. atomic bombing of Nagasaki in 1945.

"Through my work, I have dealt with natural disasters and people's deaths, and I have also had a grave concern over the nuclear accident in Fukushima because of my family's experience of nuclear warfare," he said.

Hearing Imura's proposal to use logs and wooden boards from Kawauchi in the drum float, Akira Ura, the 76-year-old chief of the Kabashima neighborhood community association, immediately gave the green light because reaching out to the devastated community fits the festival's traditional theme.

"The Kunchi festival originated from people's respect for nature, and its purpose is to encourage people," Ura said. "It is our pleasure to support Fukushima communities."

After Imura contacted the Kawauchi village government, Taizo Shiga, a 67-year-old forestry company operator, came forward to offer hinoki cypress logs and boards for the float for free of charge. Before being shipped to Nagasaki, the logs passed radioactivity measurement tests.

"Ungrounded vicious rumors on safety issues have prevented our products from fetching decent prices at markets, and we can no longer run our business like we used to," Shiga said.

"We have been saddened by the current situation, but it is certainly encouraging to hear that our products will be used in the valiant festival."

Imura said he plans to invite residents from Kawauchi to attend the Nagasaki when the new float debuts in the 2018 festival.

Fishermen hold New Year ceremony

January 8, 2015

Struggling Fukushima fishermen hold 1st New Year's ceremony in 5 years

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201601080053>

By TAKURO NEGISHI/ Staff Writer

IWAKI, Fukushima Prefecture--Fishermen held a traditional New Year's ceremony here on Jan. 8 for the first time since the 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster killed their colleagues and ruined their livelihoods.

With their vessels flying colorful banners, the fishermen gathered at Hisanohama fishing port in the northern part of Iwaki in the morning to pray for a safe and bountiful harvest.

After traditional Shinto rituals were performed, the fishermen set off from the port to cleanse their 30 or so boats with seawater and sake. From their boats, they offered prayers to the Shinto shrines and "torii" gates located along the coast.

"Today is our New Year's Day 2016," said Akira Egawa, the 68-year-old head of the Hisanohama branch of the Iwaki city fishery association. "All the fishermen looked happy."

Although the ceremony is an annual event, the fishermen had refrained from holding it until now in light of the misery that the March 2011 disaster brought to the area.

The tsunami spawned by the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011, slammed into the Hisanohama district around the port, killing about 60 people.

One of the biggest hurdles they continue to face is the spread of negative publicity about food safety in the area in light of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant north of Iwaki.

Leaks of contaminated water from the nuclear plant are another reason why the fishermen are unable to resume large-scale operations.

But with 2016 being the hallmark fifth year since the disaster, the fishermen decided to resume the ceremony.

Fishermen on the Fukushima Prefecture coast are currently operating on a trial basis, targeting 71 species of marine animals deemed safe by authorities.

The fish catch in the region in 2014 was about 740 tons, a mere 3 percent of the annual haul before the 2011 disaster.

Prefectural authorities in 2015 tested 8,577 marine specimens for radioactive substances. Only four of the specimens exceeded government standards for contamination.

Renewables for Fukushima

January 9, 2016

Foundation supporting renewable energy business operators to be set up in Fukushima

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160109/p2a/00m/0na/009000c>

FUKUSHIMA -- Corporations and organizations working to promote renewable energy in the wake of the nuclear meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant announced Jan. 8 that they will establish a fund to support renewable energy projects in the prefecture.

A foundation to operate the Fukushima shizen energy kikin (Fukushima natural energy fund) will be founded as early as the end of February, and donations will be accepted beginning in early March. The group is also planning to build a museum to pass down lessons learned from the nuclear disaster to future generations.

The chief representative for the group is Yauemon Sato, the president of Aizu Electric Power Co., which promotes solar power generation in the Aizu region of Fukushima Prefecture. Sato, along with Tetsunari Iida, executive director of the nonprofit organization Institute for Sustainable Energy Policies (ISEP), and Tsuyoshi Yoshiwara, adviser to Jonan Shinkin Bank who has continued to call for Japan to phase out nuclear power, made the announcement at a press conference in Fukushima. Internationally renowned musician Ryuichi Sakamoto is also among the fund's founders.

It was a donation of approximately 3 million yen received from a German civic energy company that prompted Aizu Electric Power's Sato to propose that the fund be set up. Not only will the foundation provide funds to renewable energy business operators, but will also be involved in the development of business plans and in helping companies and organizations work with each other. The aim is for the fund to reach several billion yen in scale; the foundation will also call for land donations.

Since the outbreak of the nuclear disaster, the Fukushima Prefectural Government has set a goal of switching all energy sources within the prefecture to renewable energy by the year 2040. "It's important that the nuclear phase-out begins with Fukushima," Sato said. "We want to achieve recovery based on natural energy through civic power -- without relying on government agencies."

A symposium with former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi -- who in recent years has been calling for the elimination of nuclear power -- will be held March 9 to commemorate the foundation's launch. For more information, contact ISEP at 03-5942-8937.

First Coming of Age celebration since 3/11

January 11, 2016

Fukushima town holds first Coming-of-Age Day ceremony since nuclear disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201601110044>

By AKIFUMI NAGAHASHI/ Staff Writer

NARAHARA, Fukushima Prefecture--Seventy-three young people marked their entry into adulthood Jan. 10 in the first such ceremony held in their hometown here since the 2011 nuclear disaster.

The Coming-of-Age Day ceremony was for those who turned or will turn 20 years old by April 1. It was held a day earlier than traditional ceremonies scheduled for across Japan.

Addressing the participants, Naraha Mayor Yukiei Matsumoto said, "I want you to embrace the tough and hard times that you have gone through as valuable experiences and carve out your future."

They had all just attended a graduation ceremony at Naraha Junior High School when the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami hit on March 11, 2011, triggering the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Almost the entire town was ordered by the central government to evacuate the following day.

Since then, Coming-of-Age Day ceremonies for Naraha residents had been held in Iwaki, also in Fukushima Prefecture, as many households evacuated there.

The evacuation order was lifted last September.

Kaede Nogi, 20, speaking on behalf of the participants at the ceremony on Jan. 10, extended her gratitude, saying, "I am very happy that I could mark the milestone day in my hometown which I love, and with my friends whom I love."

Nogi transferred to a high school in Kanagawa Prefecture after living at an evacuation center in Iwaki.

Nogi is now studying at a university in Chiba Prefecture. She aspires to become an elementary school teacher in Fukushima Prefecture so as to pass on her experiences of life as an evacuee to children there.

Singapore may also ease restrictions on Fukushima foods

January 11, 2015

Singapore to consider easing import restrictions on Fukushima food items

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/01/11/national/social-issues/singapore-consider-japanese-request-ease-restrictions-fukushima-food-items/#.VpNpBFIR-ot>

JJI

SINGAPORE – Singapore has agreed to "positively" consider a request to ease its import restrictions on food and other farm products from Fukushima Prefecture, according to Japanese officials.

Lawrence Wong, Singapore's national development minister, said in a meeting Sunday with agriculture minister Hiroshi Moriyama that he will consider the request while examining moves on the matter by the European Union and others.

Moriyama told reporters after the meeting that he explained the EU's recent decision and asked Wong to ease the restrictions based on scientific grounds.

The EU on Saturday substantially eased its import restrictions on Japanese food and farm products, including those from Fukushima Prefecture. The curbs were introduced after the March 2011 crisis at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Govt to lift evacuation orders for 9 municipalities

January 12, 2016

Govt. to help Fukushima evacuees return home

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Jan. 11, 2016 - Updated 23:31 UTC+1

The Japanese government says it will **step up efforts to help evacuees return to communities** affected by the 2011 nuclear accident in Fukushima Prefecture.

The government plans to lift all evacuation orders for 9 municipalities near the damaged nuclear plant by the end of March next year.

The plan excludes some areas that have the highest levels of radioactive fallout from the nuclear disaster.

Of the 9 municipalities where evacuation orders are still in place, evacuees from the city of Minami-Soma, the town of Kawamata and the villages of Katsurao and Kawauchi are allowed to stay at their homes overnight as they prepare to return if the orders are lifted.

But **there are persistent concerns among evacuees about radiation and the living environment if they return.**

The government plans to speed up measures to help rebuild commercial areas, medical institutions and welfare facilities in those communities.

The government also plans to help businesses construct factories, stores and restaurants with subsidies earmarked in the draft budget for fiscal 2016 that starts in April.

Five years on: Time to reflect on recovery?

January 11, 2016

Editorial: 5th anniversary of 3.11 disasters moment to reflect on recovery, Japan's future

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160111/p2a/00m/0na/006000c>

One of the lesser known casualties of the destruction wrought by the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdowns could be linguistic. Dialects unique to some areas hit by the triple disaster are thought to be in danger of dying out, as the communities that speak them have collapsed.

Tohoku University professor Takashi Kobayashi and other researchers conducted a survey on dialects in the disaster areas. In his related book, Kobayashi points out that restoration of regional communities cannot be achieved without restoration of local culture. "This is because the people lived immersed in regional culture," he wrote.

March 2016 will mark the fifth anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake. However, work to restore disaster-hit areas has not progressed smoothly. In many cases, regional communities partly defined by their local dialects have disintegrated, their residents losing the local web of mutual emotional support after being forced to evacuate to other areas. Currently, over 180,000 survivors are living away from their hometowns, about 100,000 of them from parts of Fukushima Prefecture affected by the nuclear crisis. Many have no prospect of returning home in the foreseeable future.

In a meeting of the government's Reconstruction Promotion Council in October, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said, "The government is determined to achieve psychological recovery from the disasters by supporting efforts to form regional communities and taking other measures," in addition to reconstruction of homes destroyed by the disasters. But what does "psychological recovery" mean?

In June 2011, the Reconstruction Design Council in Response to the Great East Japan Earthquake compiled a report calling for "creative" reconstruction of disaster-hit areas, and submitted it to then Prime Minister Naoto Kan. The recommendation was based on the idea that **people can endure hardships better if they have hope for the future.**

The report called for regional community-oriented reconstruction and stated that the national government should work out a basic reconstruction policy and specific systems to support such reconstruction work. Whether politicians can light the flame of hope in disaster areas is being tested.

Looking at the reality, however, politicians have failed to achieve this. Reconstruction of disaster-hit areas is now closely linked to the Abe administration's key local economic revitalization policy. This is because the triple disasters sped up the local aging of society and depopulation in disaster-hit areas.

The government is designating a five-year period from spring 2016 for the reconstruction and vitalization of local economies. In other words, the government is looking to turn reconstruction of areas devastated by the disasters into a model of this policy. The government has worked out specific measures to put the brakes on the declining population as part of efforts to boost local economies, but has also failed to show a clear vision for residents' future livelihoods.

Areas of central Niigata Prefecture hit by the Chuetsu Earthquake in 2004 have given a clue to how to revitalize local economies. Most areas hit by the quake are in mountainous areas where the population is

aging and decreasing. Based on a spirit of mutual help within their communities, these regions set goals of restoring sustainable livelihoods for mountain residents and trying to bring about a future suited to regional resources and characteristics. They also interacted with many supporters outside their regions and made the best of cooperative reconstruction efforts.

It is true that the Great East Japan Earthquake contributed to depopulation, but there are positive aspects of disaster areas.

A panel of experts to evaluate reconstruction following the Chuetsu quake pointed out in a report released in March last year that residents of affected areas were living positively. "We visited areas hit by the disaster on the occasion of the 10th anniversary. We have the impression that people are lively and active in their neighborhoods, interacting with each other and enjoying the richness of their lives in mountainous areas, instead of feeling that their communities are slumping because of depopulation," the report said.

The scale of the Chuetsu disaster and the environment of the affected areas are different from those of the Great East Japan Earthquake. Still, it is a common goal for all areas across the country to find ways to maintain and make effective use of mountain areas' abundance and unique characteristics despite depopulation.

Some regions devastated by the Great East Japan Earthquake are taking advantage of their characteristics to steadily recover from the disaster.

The Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics will be held in 2020, when the period for reconstruction and vitalization of local economies nears an end, and human capital and funds will further concentrate in the capital. This tendency could widen a perception gap between Tokyo residents, who are excited at the Games, and those in other regions that have barely benefited from the event.

If this perception gap widens, it would damage national unity. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind the Reconstruction Design Council's recommendation that "all people should take on the massive disasters as their own problem, strengthen their solidarity and share the burden with each other in promoting reconstruction."

On March 11, 2016, the anniversary of the triple disasters, it is necessary to evaluate the reconstruction efforts that have been made so far. It is the role of not only politicians but also all members of the public to consider how to design the future of Japan, including disaster areas. We must together light a flame of hope in all regions of Japan, based on reflection on the past five years.

Tours of stricken plant increasingly popular



Visitors to the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant pass storage tanks holding contaminated water. (Provided by Appreciate Fukushima Workers)

January 12, 2016

Stricken Fukushima nuclear power plant now a popular destination

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201601120042>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

It may seem surreal, but as work continues to decommission damaged reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant--a project that involves 7,000 or so workers--tours of the complex by outsiders are becoming increasingly popular.

By the end of last September, or four-and-a-half years since the nuclear accident triggered by the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami disaster, some 16,000 people had visited.

Initially, visitors to the stricken facility were mainly politicians and specialists. But more recently, ordinary citizens are taking part as radiation levels have fallen at the plant site.

Nineteen university students took a tour last November. The bus they rode took them past large tanks holding contaminated water as well as a massive piece of equipment attached to a reactor building to extract nuclear fuel. Throughout the visit, workers wearing protective clothing and face masks could be seen.

Nana Ohashi, a sophomore at Tokyo's Keio University, said, "It really hit me that those in my generation will not be able to ignore the alternatives regarding what to do about nuclear energy and decommissioning the reactors."

The tour was organized by a group called AFW, which stands for Appreciate Fukushima Workers. Led by Akihiro Yoshikawa, 35, a former employee of Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the stricken plant, the

group began escorting tours by residents living along the Pacific coast of Fukushima Prefecture from 2015. A major objective of the tours is to show residents what decommissioning involves.

"If ordinary citizens abandon interest, the plant site will be further shut off from the rest of the world," Yoshikawa said.

He said that 140 or so people had participated in the seven tours organized to date.

Iwaki resident Kaori Suganami, 39, took part in a tour last June.

She said, "It is wrong to think 'someone else will do the work.'"

Because of the core meltdowns at the No. 1 to No. 3 reactors, high levels of radiation continue to be emitted. This makes it very difficult to approach those three reactors.

Elsewhere, though, rubble that was strewn throughout the plant grounds due to the tsunami generated by the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake has been removed, and radiation levels in many areas have dropped significantly. Ground surfaces have been paved and trees felled, which has also helped lower radiation levels.

According to TEPCO, about 900 people visited in the first year after the nuclear accident. Since then, the annual number of visitors has continued to increase. Local residents joining the tours also grew in number. About 3,700 people visited the plant in the first half of fiscal 2015. Of that number, about 250 were from Fukushima Prefecture.

Unlike workers at the plant site, visitors are not required to wear heavy protective gear. The basic getup is cotton gloves, disposable face masks and special footwear. Visitors are required to carry dosimeters. To reduce radiation exposure, visitors remain on the bus for large parts of the tour. Radiation exposure after an hour is in the range of 10 microsieverts, which is about 1 percent of the maximum additional radiation exposure of 1 millisievert established for the general population.

In April 2014, TEPCO established a visitation center at the Fukushima plant and two to three groups consisting of individuals 18 or older are allowed in daily. But not just anyone is allowed on the tours. "An overall assessment is made after considering such factors as the objective of the visit," said a TEPCO official.

The decommissioning work is expected to take decades.

Hideaki Noro, the TEPCO official in charge of the visitation center, said: "Interest in the work serves as the core motivating factor for employees and decommissioning workers. We plan to actively allow in visitors for as long as possible."

(This article was written by Chikako Kawahara and Takuro Negishi.)

Ravaged Miyagi hurt by population decline

January 13, 2016

Coastal areas of tsunami-ravaged prefecture still hurt by drop in population

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/quake_tsunami/AJ201601130067

By HARUFUMI MORI/ Staff Writer

SENDAI--Tsunami-stricken coastal areas of Miyagi Prefecture registered significant population declines, but the overall number of residents dropped only slightly due to an influx of workers and volunteers to urban areas, national census figures show.

The population of the northeastern prefecture as of Oct. 1 stood at 2,334,215, down 13,950, or 0.6 percent, from the last census taken in 2010, a year before the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami that triggered a nuclear crisis in nearby Fukushima Prefecture.

In releasing the figures Jan. 12, the Miyagi prefectural government stressed that they are only preliminary. It estimated that the number of people relocating to the prefecture outnumbered those leaving by about 24,000 since 2010. The inflow is due mainly to the number of people engaged in reconstruction projects, construction work and volunteer activities to help the prefecture recover from the disaster. That helped stem a sharp decline in the prefecture's overall population even though many residents perished in the tsunami or moved away.

Authorities said at least 6,000 residents who evacuated their homes after the tsunami disaster are still living outside the prefecture. It also noted that many others died or went missing in the disaster.

The population increase centered mainly in urban areas.

In Sendai, the population increased by 36,199, or 3.5 percent, from 2010.

On the other hand, municipalities along the scenic Sanriku coast in the northern part of Miyagi Prefecture experienced a significant population decrease because of the devastation caused by tsunami that claimed around 12,000 lives locally.

The town of Onagawa found its population depleted by 37 percent. This was the highest rate in the three disaster-hit prefectures of Fukushima, Iwate and Miyagi, excluding municipalities where evacuation orders were issued following the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The town of Minami-Sanriku found its population dropped by 29 percent.

See also :

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/quake_tsunami/AJ201512290050

Still rescuing strays cats in Fukushima

January 13, 2016

5 years on, efforts continue to rescue stray cats around Fukushima plant

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201601130071>

By MAKOTO TAKADA/ Staff Writer

MIHARU, Fukushima Prefecture--With the onset of another freezing winter, the head of a private group founded in this town to rescue cats left behind when residents evacuated from the nuclear accident worries about their continued survival.

"Surviving the winter will be tough for cats since the animals don't endure the cold weather very well," said Akira Honda, who operates the Nyander Guard.

"We want to save all the lives left behind in the difficult-to-return zone and elsewhere," he said, referring to the off-limits area around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

In December, Fukushima prefectural officials closed a shelter for pets abandoned by their owners, concluding that nearly five years after the nuclear disaster, it is highly unlikely that any remain in the restricted area.

However, efforts are still ongoing by private groups to retrieve cats left by their evacuating owners.

In one such "rescue mission," Takemi Shirota, a staff member with the Nyander Guard, traveled to Okuma, which co-hosts the plant and is situated in the "difficult-to-return" zone, in November.

The zone is where annual radiation exposure levels exceeded 50 millisieverts as of the end of March 2012, well beyond the permitted additional exposure of 1 millisievert a year for the public.

Evacuees from the zone are allowed visits to their homes if they obtain a permit from the central government and local authorities.

Shirota's search in the difficult-to-return zone was arranged to coincide with special day trips by displaced residents.

When she went to check on cages with food placed the day before to capture cats, a calico feline was inside one.

The calico, still wearing a collar, looked shabby after years of roaming in the wild.

When Shirota, 39, reached to pick up the animal, it did not resist.

"This cat must have had an owner before the accident," she said.

The Nyander Guard is trying to find the cat's owner through its website.

The group conducts a search in accordance with a request from a pet owner.

To assist in its search, it uses surveillance cameras set up in specific sections in the zone after gaining permission from affected landowners and home owners.

Surveillance footage showed that the feline, which the Nyander Guard staff calls Miko, had roamed for about 2 kilometers over rough terrain since it was first spotted.

The feline is believed to be one of many pets that their owners could not take with them as they fled soon after the triple meltdown unfolded at the nuclear complex on March 11, 2011, following the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

About 24,000 people from the difficult-to-return zone remain displaced, and it is still uncertain as to when they can return to resume their normal lives.

Some displaced residents regret that they did not take their pets with them, regardless of the circumstances.

A middle-aged woman from Tomioka, a town next to Okuma, gave up on taking her cat with her when she fled to Koriyama, also in the prefecture.

The reason was that keeping her cat in a shelter would have been virtually impossible, with a large number of evacuees crowded into a limited space.

Each time she returned to her home on a temporary visit, the feline was there waiting to be fed.

But the cat later disappeared.

After seeing a photo of a feline resembling hers at the Nyander Guard's website, the woman went to the cat shelter operated by the group to check it out.

The animal was not hers, after all.

"I should have evacuated with my cat, no matter what," the tearful woman told the staff.

Honda, the president of an automotive parts manufacturer, moved to Fukushima Prefecture from Nagoya, where his company is based, to launch efforts to rescue animals in April 2011.

In December the same year, Honda purchased a rental house in Miharu to turn it into a shelter for cats.

Apart from Honda and Shirota, four other staff members are involved in the Nyander Guard.

Honda, 52, shuttles between Nagoya and Miharu to juggle his business and rescue operations.

The group has captured about 400 cats so far and tries to track down their owners or find them new homes.

About 60 cats from the difficult-to-return zone are still under its care today, most are believed to have been born after the nuclear disaster.

Honda said it costs more than 2 million yen (\$17,000) a month to finance their activities, including utilities, feed and personnel costs.

He covers the difference out of his own pocket because donations from organizations and individuals, as well as subsidies from the prefectural government to fund part of the manpower costs, are not enough.

The Nyander Guard is not the only group leading rescue efforts.

Private groups and individuals in and outside the prefecture have engaged in efforts to retrieve dogs and cats in the stricken area at their own expenses.

The Fukushima prefectural government, too, launched a search for pets in the “no-entry” zone, a radius of 20 kilometers from the Fukushima plant, a month after the nuclear accident occurred.

The number of dogs and cats that were captured and kept at a shelter under this initiative numbered 463 and 545, respectively, over the past four years and eight months, according to prefectural officials.

Of these, about 30 percent of the animals were returned to their owners. New homes were found for about 60 percent. The remainder died while in the shelter.

Heeding requests by many evacuees, the central government revised the Basic Disaster Management Plan in December 2011, incorporating a clause calling for reserving space for pets at evacuation centers.

Still, many pets will likely be left behind when residents are forced hurriedly to evacuate, as was demonstrated when torrential downpours flooded large areas in the Kanto and Tohoku regions last September.

“People should be ready with a contingency plan before an emergency hits,” said Shirota, who serves as the chief of the Nyander Guard’s shelter.

Kanji and sake for Fukushima

January 17, 2016

Fukushima town hopes to translate kanji and sake into tourism cash

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/01/17/national/fukushima-town-hopes-translate-kanji-sake-tourism-cash/#.Vpu4zFKDmot>

Fukushima Minpo

Residents of Kitakata, a northeastern Fukushima Prefecture city known for promoting antiquated Japanese kanji, are stepping up efforts to attract more tourists by linking the pictographs to sake breweries in the area.

Kitakata wo Kanji no Machi ni suru Kai, a citizens' group promoting pictographs created some 3,000 years ago, is preparing walking courses to encourage people to visit breweries in the city.

They hope that tourists on the walking courses will join games to check signboards bearing an ancient character symbolizing each brewery and come up with words by putting the characters together.

The group, which has been setting up antiquated-kanji signboards at stores and creating walking courses to visit them, now plans to create three new courses focusing on breweries to attract more tourists.

Participants in the walking tours, expected to start in spring, will visit breweries — some of them not usually open to the public — and will be provided with a special *ochoko* (small cylindrical cup) to sample sake at the sites.

Currently, there are some 220 such signboards set up in the city, with the group planning to set up more at breweries that lack them.

According to the Kitakata Municipal Government, the average time tourists spend in the city is about four hours, more than an hour shorter than the average spent at other major tourist sites in the nation. The municipal government hopes to promote visits to the breweries along with trips to popular Kitakata ramen shops, so that tourists will spend more time in the area.

In an expansion of activities first started by the late Masami Takahashi, an engraver of antiquated kanji, the citizens' group, headed by 38-year-old Masahiro Ueno, has also created cards featuring the kanji characters, which will be put on sale and used at the group's events to make children more interested in kanji.

Takahashi's family plans to turn his workshop in central Kitakata into a gallery that will be open to the public by the end of this month to realize his long dream of creating a place that educates people about kanji.

"We members hope to tread in his footsteps and work together to promote the city by combining kanji and tourism," Ueno said.

This section appears every third Monday and features topics and issues covered by the Fukushima Minpo, the largest newspaper in Fukushima Prefecture. The original article was published on Jan. 4

New tomato farm for Fukushima

January 21, 2016

Repentant ex-TEPCO exec helps Fukushima with new tomato farm

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201601210044>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

MINAMI-SOMA, Fukushima Prefecture--A former Tokyo Electric Power Co. executive who feels guilt over the 2011 nuclear disaster is behind the start-up of a tomato farm which opened in the devastated region here Jan. 20.

Eiju Hangai, whose previous employer operates the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, is now president of **Minami-Soma Fukko Agri KK, an enterprise formed by business leaders with ties to the city.**

At the farm's opening ceremony, Hangai said **he hopes that the project will help ease local farmers' struggles in the aftermath of the disaster at the plant.**

"We must shoulder the responsibility for causing the nuclear accident for the rest of our lives and we are hoping to carry out part of our responsibility through this initiative," he said.

"We aim to offer not only job opportunities in the agricultural sector, but also train people for future managers in the industry."

The company spent 1.1 billion yen (\$9.4 million) to purchase a 2.4 hectare property and build the farm. Of this, 740 million yen was covered by a grant from the central government designed to help businesses creating jobs.

Financial institutions in the prefecture collaborated by extending loans worth 100 million yen in start-up funds.

Around 50 local people have been hired to work on the farm in the city's Shimoota industrial park.

Mayor Katsunobu Sakurai, who is from a farming family himself, gave encouragement to the employees at the ceremony.

"Since I started in agriculture myself, I am fully aware of the frustration of farmers who could no longer do their work," he said. "I would like you to channel your frustration into hope and take pride in working in an industry that protects life."

The farm's tomato is named "Asubito Tomato" (Tomatoes grown by people playing a key role in building the future).

Minami-Soma Fukko Agri has set an **annual target of 660 tons**, with the first shipment expected in early March.

Currently, 28,000 tomato seedlings are grown in a 1.5-hectare greenhouse where the room temperature is kept above 20 degrees by computerized control.

Humidity and the concentration of carbon dioxide in the greenhouse are also managed by the computer.

Students tour ghost town Namie

January 22, 2016

Study tour gives students glimpse of stark reality facing town near crippled Fukushima plant

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201601220001>

By NATSUKI EDOGAWA/ Staff Writer

NAMIE, Fukushima Prefecture--A convenience store might seem an odd venue to start a study trip, especially when it is closed.

But the outlet in question is unusual in that it is located just 9 kilometers from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, just down the road from the Namie town hall building, and the only one where workers involved in decontamination work around the shattered nuclear facility can purchase food, drinks and other items.

The fact it reopened at all, in August 2014, marked a key step in Namie's efforts to regain a degree of normalcy after the March 2011 nuclear disaster.

Most of the store's customers work at the nuclear plant or are involved in decontamination operations in neighboring communities. As Sunday is their day off, the store also closes. That's because no one lives in Namie anymore.

The tour took the students from the Kansai region through Namie, now a veritable ghost town: houses falling into ruin near JR Namie Station, others with just their foundations remaining and a big clock at an elementary school frozen at the moment towering tsunami spawned by the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011, inundated the area and other parts of northeastern Japan.

"Even after four and a half years, during which I moved on to a technical college after finishing three years at junior high school, this town is still gripped by the disaster. The scars are everywhere," said 17-year-old Keitaro Watanabe, who attends the National Institute of Technology, Akashi College, in Akashi, Hyogo Prefecture.

Watanabe was among 19 students taking the trip in November 2015, the first trial tour organized by the Fukushima prefectural government for young people to see the tragedy that befell this part of Japan.

Although no one is allowed to stay overnight, day trips to the town are permitted.

The entire town of 20,000 or so people was evacuated as the nuclear accident, triggered by the quake and tsunami, unfolded. About 180 Namie residents lost their lives in the tsunami.

Prefectural authorities sponsored the trip to ascertain the reactions of the participants so that study tours with more meaningful programs to schools and travel agencies can be undertaken in the future. Local officials are particularly interested in visitors to the prefecture who do not need to be accompanied by their parents.

In fiscal 2009, 550,000 children out of the prefecture--ranging from elementary school pupils to college students--visited Fukushima Prefecture on school trips or training camps, according to local officials.

The number, however, plunged to less than 80,000 in fiscal 2011. In fiscal 2014, it bounced back to 250,000, half of the pre-disaster level.

For the tour to Namie, the students aged 17 to 23 traveled through the town by bus to near JR Namie station, where they alighted and strolled through the neighborhood accompanied by a town employee.

A stack of newspapers dated March 12, 2011, was piled up at a shop nearby. It was the day that the town was evacuated.

"Time has stopped," a student murmured at the sight as tears welled in her eyes.

Watanabe recalled he did not see lasting scars when he was growing up in Akashi, a city that was severely damaged by the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake.

But residents of Akashi were able to swiftly move on with rebuilding efforts because, unlike in Namie, they did not have to contend with radioactive fallout.

Ena Onishi, a student who majors in social studies of disaster management at Kobe Gakuin University in Kobe, said she initially thought a tour allowing students to experience a day in the life of an evacuee will be a good approach to bolster visitor numbers.

But her view was somewhat altered, she said, after listening to Fukushima high school students at a gathering prior to the trip to Namie.

They stressed the importance of watching and remembering today's Fukushima because the prefecture will undergo a significant change in coming years.

"Only after coming to Fukushima, I have realized the enormity of the challenge facing people struggling to rebuild," she said.

Onishi said the big stumbling block to a Fukushima tour is a widespread concern about the possible impact of radiation, something that prefectural officials are also trying to counter.

Her mother was very concerned about the trip, while some of her friends said they will delay visiting Fukushima.

Their concerns are understandable, but the trip was rewarding nevertheless, Onishi added.

“There are many things we can learn from today’s Fukushima,” she said.

Prefectural officials said the recent trip to Namie was an opportunity to get input from the participants so they could create a more worthwhile tour in the future.

One program they are weighing is bringing together tour participants and local high school students to interact with each other.

Improvement in obesity rate

January 25, 2016

Health campaign has lowered obesity rate among Fukushima children, study shows

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/01/25/national/health-campaign-has-lowered-obesity-rate-among-fukushima-children-study-shows/#.VqXoFlKDmot>

JJI

A push to increase exercise among children in Fukushima Prefecture has resulted in a decreased obesity rate, according to preliminary data from the education ministry.

The proportion of children who are at least 20 percent heavier than the national standard fell for 10 of the 13 grades from kindergarten through high school.

In fiscal 2012 to 2014, the proportion of such children in Fukushima Prefecture was the highest in the 47 prefectures for sixth and seventh graders, apparently reflecting restrictions on outdoor activities due to fears over radiation exposure following the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

In 2015, however, none of the prefecture’s grade groups were heaviest among the nation’s prefectures, according to an education ministry report released Friday.

The board of education in Fukushima took measures following the crisis that included a program to increase the amount of exercise during physical education classes and sending experts to schools to extoll the benefits of exercise.

The board also promoted healthier *washoku* Japanese cuisine for school lunches as part of dietary education.

The declines in the proportion of obese children also came after playgrounds were moved inside buildings and **restrictions on outdoor activities were eased after progress in decontamination work.**

“The children’s awareness of exercise is improving,” an official on the board of education said. “But **we will continue efforts as the proportion of overweight children (in the prefecture) is still higher than average,** with four grades having the second-highest proportions of obese children (in the country).”

Nationwide, the proportion of obese children declined, while the average body height and weight remained unchanged.

Visual acuity dropped. The proportion of children with an acuity of less than 1.0 on the Japanese scale without glasses stood at 30.97 percent, marking a record high.

An official in the education ministry said the rise may reflect the wider use of smartphones and mobile games.

The data are based on results of health checkups conducted from April to June on 3.35 million children.

Reducing 20-km ban radius?

January 27, 2016

Fukushima fishermen to expand operations off crippled nuclear plant

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/01/27/national/fukushima-fishermen-to-expand-operations-off-crippled-nuclear-plant/#.VqkknFKDmot>

JJI

FUKUSHIMA – Fishermen in Fukushima Prefecture said Wednesday they plan to scale down their self-imposed fishing ban in waters off the damaged nuclear power plant due mainly to a **substantial decline in radioactive cesium levels**.

The Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations is considering narrowing the area subject to the ban to a 10-kilometer radius from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant from the current 20-kilometer radius.

The move comes as plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. last autumn completed the construction of a shielding wall to prevent leaks of contaminated groundwater into the sea. Since the completion, radiation levels in sea waters at the plant's port have been declining.

In addition, **prefectural research shows the radioactive cesium levels of marine products caught in coastal areas have dropped substantially.**

The proportion of marine products with cesium levels exceeding the state standards of 100 becquerels per kilogram fell to less than 0.1 percent last year from some 40 percent between April and December 2011, soon after the nuclear accident at the plant in March that year. No products have surpassed the level in checks since last April.

The federation is scheduled to make a **final decision late next month**. "The environment of the seas of Fukushima has improved, and conditions for reviving fisheries are being laid out," federation leader Tetsu Nozaki told reporters.

After the tsunami-triggered triple meltdown at the nuclear plant, the federation voluntarily halted all of its coastal fishing. In June 2012, it started trial operations in a limited area, which has since expanded in steps.

Group forms to keep an eye on TEPCO's criminal trial

January 27, 2016

Group to monitor trial of former TEPCO executives to clarify truth about Fukushima disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201601270055>

By MASAKAZU HONDA/ Staff Writer

Lawyers, journalists and scientists will form a group to help expose the truth and spread details about the Fukushima nuclear disaster during the criminal trial of three former executives of Tokyo Electric Power Co.

"We will encourage the court to hold a fair trial while transmitting information regarding the trial across the nation," said an official of the planned organization, whose name is translated as "support group for the criminal procedure on the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant."

Tsunehisa Katsumata, former chairman of TEPCO, the operator of the crippled plant, and two former vice presidents, Sakae Muto and Ichiro Takekuro, face mandatory charges of professional negligence resulting in death and injury.

Although the trial is still months away, 33 people are now setting up the group, including **Ruiko Muto**, who heads an organization pursuing the criminal responsibility of TEPCO and government officials for the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Tetsuji Imanaka, an assistant professor of nuclear engineering at the Kyoto University Research Reactor Institute, and Norma Field, a professor emeritus of East Asian Studies at the University of Chicago, have also joined.

Three reactors melted down at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami struck on March 11, 2011. A number of hospital patients died in the chaotic evacuation. About 14,000 residents of Fukushima Prefecture filed a criminal complaint against TEPCO executives, government officials and scientists in 2012, saying they were aware of the dangers to the Fukushima nuclear plant from a tsunami, but they failed in their responsibility to take proper countermeasures. Tokyo prosecutors twice decided not to indict the three former TEPCO executives. However, the Tokyo No. 5 Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution, a panel of citizens, decided to forcibly indict the three in July last year.

"It has been almost five years since the disaster, but many details, including their foreseeability of the tsunami, remain unclear," said science writer **Takashi Soeda**, one of the group's co-founders. "As TEPCO has not unveiled a sufficient amount of information even in inquiries conducted by the Diet and the government or in civil lawsuits, the truth must be uncovered through the legal force of a criminal trial." Five lawyers appointed by the Tokyo District Court will act as prosecutors in the trial.

Legal experts expect the lawyers will indict the former TEPCO executives and release a statement naming the victims around March 11, the fifth anniversary of the triple disaster that still haunts the Tohoku region.

Takahama: Don't bank (only) on nuclear

January 31, 2016

Town tries to shift away from heavy dependence on nuclear plant

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/01/31/national/town-tries-shift-away-heavy-dependence-nuclear-plant/#.Vq3UtFKDmot>

JJI

TAKAHAMA, FUKUI PREF. – In the wake of the disastrous nuclear accident in northeastern Japan nearly five years ago, the Fukui Prefecture town of Takahama has been seeking ways to reduce its heavy dependence on a nuclear power plant for its livelihood.

“It is true that we’ve depended on the nuclear industry,” said a local official responsible for community buildings in the municipality, home to Kansai Electric Power Co.’s Takahama nuclear plant.

The town and the nuclear power station have “become inseparable” since the plant’s No. 1 reactor started operations in 1974, according to the official.

The plant has provided jobs for the community, with the much of the town’s economy geared towards providing services for those who work at the facility.

On Friday, the plant’s No. 3 reactor was brought back online after a hiatus of nearly four years, becoming the third reactor in the nation to restart operations under the country’s new safety standards compiled after the March 2011 accident at Tokyo Electric Power Co.’s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. Kansai Electric plans to reactivate the No. 4 reactor at the plant in late February.

In fiscal 2014, which ended in March last year, the town’s revenues related to the nuclear plant, including subsidies and fixed-asset tax income, totaled ¥5,072 million, accounting for 51 percent of its total general-account revenue.

However, the Fukushima No. 1 plant accident changed the town’s way of thinking.

“We’ve come to think seriously that the town must not depend solely on the nuclear industry,” the town official said. “We are now aiming to reshape the town into a community that does not rely on nuclear power.”

As part of its effort, the town is looking to its beaches with their beautiful landscapes and pristine waters. In 1985, nearly 1.2 million people visited the town’s eight swimming beaches.

The number of visitors has since decreased as many more outlets where people can spend their leisure time have become available. Still, some 204,100 people, mainly from the western Kansai region, visited the area for its beaches last year.

One tourist activity the town is promoting is a sea kayak tour of oddly shaped rocks.

Takahama is also trying to obtain the Blue Flag international environmental certification for its Wakasawada beach.

There are more than 4,000 Blue Flag beaches and marinas around the world, including beaches in Amalfi Italy and Nice France. The certification program is administered by the Foundation for Environmental Education, a Copenhagen-based nonprofit organization.

To be certified, a beach or marina must meet 33 criteria, including water quality and safety. No site in Asia has so far obtained the Blue Flag.

The city of Kamakura in Kanagawa Prefecture has also filed for the Blue Flag certification.

Decisions on whether to certify the Wakasawada and Yuigahama beaches are expected to be made later this year.

But a 62-year-old man who runs an inn near the Wakasawada beach said, “The number of visitors would not increase suddenly even if the beach receives the Blue Flag.”

A Takahama municipal government official also said, “What we will do after obtaining the certification is important.”

Trying to resurrect Iitate

January 30, 2016

Students aim to revive beef farming in Fukushima village hit by nuclear disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201601300021>

By SAYURI IDE/ Staff Writer

When Sota Sato sought a way to help rebuild his hometown of Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture, still evacuated from the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, he discovered a mouthwatering solution.

The 23-year-old in the University of Tokyo's Graduate School of Agricultural and Life Sciences knew instantly last June when he bit into "madei" beef, a speciality of his village.

"It was so palatable that it almost brought tears to my eyes," Sato recalled.

Madei beef is a variety related to Iitate beef, a premium Japanese "wagyu" that Iitate is known for. In the local dialect, "madei" means giving greater care.

At a local products fair from the Tohoku region held Jan. 10 at the University of Tokyo's Faculty of Agriculture, Sato called out, "Madei beef is delicious! Why don't you give it a try?"

The targeted 150 plates of madei beef were sold out at the event.

"The people's reaction was more positive than I had anticipated," said Sato.

Participating in the fair was a preview for a university festival in May.

He believes that madei beef has a great potential for underpinning the local economy.

Sato has been pondering how to resurrect the village, which is located northwest of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, in the wake of the triple meltdown.

Adoring **Iitate's idyllic setting** since childhood, Sato has always been devoted to the well-being of the village.

While in high school, he had already decided to become the village head someday.

Today, about 6,000 villagers are still displaced as Iitate is designated an area where residents cannot return to live yet.

During his search for a way to revive his hometown, he encountered Masao Kobayashi, a 59-year-old cattle farmer from Iitate.

Kobayashi is raising 142 madei beef cattle in a barn in Sanmu, Chiba Prefecture, after evacuating along with the animals.

Sato visited Kobayashi's barn in June and tasted beef from the local breed for the first time in a very long time.

The experience made him realize anew that Iitate has something that residents can take great pride in.

Selling the madei beef at his university festival is an effort to bring attention to the local beef industry and Iitate's plight.

He undertook the project with 16 others--peers from the village who are committed to doing something for Iitate and graduate school friends who empathize with the initiative.

Sato is aware that some villagers believe that rebuilding Iitate is next to impossible. He concedes the enormous challenges facing the local livestock industry and said it may be the generation after his before it finally returns to the level before the nuclear disaster. But Sato said he will never give up, doing whatever he can with comrades who share his goal.

Still traumatised after 5 years

February 1, 2016

Five years later, thoughts of 3/11 continue to overwhelm survivors, survey finds

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/02/01/national/five-years-later-thoughts-of-311-continue-to-overwhelm-survivors-survey-finds/#.Vq-Cu1KDmos>

Kyodo

As the fifth anniversary of the March 2011 Tohoku disasters approaches, a survey shows that more than 70 percent of people in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures remain overwhelmed when recalling the days just after the massive earthquake and tsunami.

The questionnaire, conducted by Kyodo News in December and released Sunday, covered 300 people — 100 from each prefecture — in one-on-one interviews. All lived in coastal areas that were engulfed by tsunami and now live in either temporary or public housing for disaster victims or have rebuilt their homes.

Asked if it still hurts to recall the days after the disasters, 26.3 percent, or 79 people, said it frequently does, while 46.3 percent said it is sometimes painful.

The combined 72.6 percent shows that nearly five years on, many people are still struggling to move on from the deadly disasters.

Of those who answered affirmatively, 47.3 percent said that the loss of loved ones, including family and friends, hurts the most.

Some noted sleeping disorders stemming from the disasters, while others — including some whose entire families were wiped out in the catastrophe — said they continue to be plagued by survivor guilt.

"I lost my two older sisters and other relatives," said Shizuo Motoki, 75, who was living in the town of Minamisanriku, Miyagi Prefecture, when the disasters hit. "It still hurts."

Another 44 percent said seeing their homes and assets destroyed dealt them a heavy financial blow, while 42.7 percent said the memory of their hometown being hit by the twin disasters continues to haunt them.

"I watched people and houses washed away by a tsunami wave that was moving about 30 km per hour," said Toshio Kikuchi, 66, who said he still has nightmares about that day.

"That trauma is still with me," he said.

An 82-year-old woman from the town of Otsuchi, Iwate Prefecture, said she still recalls with dread being swept away by the waves and ending up trapped under rubble.

For a smaller percentage, 12.8 percent of the respondents, not being able to return to their hometowns after the catastrophe at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant remains a harsh reality.

A 74-year-old man from Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, recalled the hardship of having to evacuate multiple times.

"There was an explosion and the air trembled," recalled a woman, 77, who lived in the town of Namie, Fukushima Prefecture. "Since then, I don't feel like going back to Namie."

According to Hiroaki Tomita, a professor of disaster psychiatry at Tohoku University, recalling traumatic experiences can also be a way of overcoming them and moving on.

"We need to check closely on people who aren't able to discuss these thoughts with anyone and who are seeing their health and daily lives affected by this," Tomita said.

Reopening of outdoor skating rink

February 1, 2016

Outdoor skating rink in Fukushima town reopens for first time in 5 years

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160201/p2a/00m/0na/012000c>

KAWAMATA, Fukushima -- An outdoor skating rink here that was closed in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster reopened on Jan. 31 for the first time in five years.

The Kinu no Sato Yamakiya Skating Rink, familiarly known as the "Tanbo (rice paddy) Rink," first opened three decades ago, and is operated by locals.

After the Fukushima meltdowns triggered by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, the Yamakiya district of Kawamata where the rink stands was placed under an evacuation order. Decontamination work in the town finished in December last year, and when the town measured the airborne radiation level around the rink, it was found to be no more than 0.23 microsieverts per hour. In addition, residents have begun staying in the town in preparation to return, so officials decided to reopen the rink.

Speed skater Hiroyasu Shimizu, who won a gold medal at the Nagano Olympic Games in 1998, arrived on the opening day and passed on skating tips to children.

"I hope this once again becomes a place filled with children's laughter like before the earthquake," he said.

Forest too need decontaminating

February 3, 2016

Municipalities ask for forest decontamination

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20160203_30.html

Feb. 3, 2016 - Updated 10:45 UTC+1

Representatives of municipalities surrounding the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant have asked the central government to clean even remote forest areas of radioactive fallout.

Officials from 8 municipalities made the request to Shinji Inoue, State Minister of Environment, in Tokyo on Wednesday.

The central government has limited radiation clean-up work to areas up to 20 meters outside each community. Campsites and other areas that people often visit are included, but the work does not cover other areas including most forests.

At the meeting, Seiichi Sasaki, chairperson of the assembly of Futaba Town, said the ministry's current plan discourages evacuees from his town from returning home. He asked the state minister to decontaminate even remote forest areas.

Inoue replied that his ministry is ready to expand the clean-up work to forests that are close to living areas. He recommended the municipalities discuss specific plans with the ministry officials.

He also indicated that the Environment Ministry will soon launch a joint taskforce with other government offices to consider plans to regenerate forests in remote areas.

Unclaimed schoolbags

February 4, 2016

Unclaimed school backpacks pulled from 3/11 tsunami debris incinerated

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/02/04/national/unclaimed-school-backpacks-pulled-311-tsunami-debris-incinerated/#.VrODcVKDmot>



Kyodo

SENDAI – Authorities in Natori, Miyagi Prefecture, said Thursday they have begun to incinerate about 3,000 backpacks and other school pupils' belongings washed ashore in the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami after their owners could not be found.

The items, including leather rucksacks, other bags and musical instruments, had been kept at the former site of Yuriage Elementary School after being retrieved by Self-Defense Forces personnel and volunteers raking through tsunami debris in the months following the disaster.

The authorities had held regular viewings of the items and took requests from people wishing to look through them, but received only two such requests since April last year.

The city said it decided to dispose of the items due to diminishing public interest and the lack of a suitable storage facility, with the current site scheduled to be demolished in the near future as part of land rezoning.

Incineration began Wednesday and is scheduled to run through Friday.

About 240,000 photographs also recovered from the debris have been digitized and can be viewed at six community centers in Natori.

City employee Hiroshi Ogasawara who oversaw the collection for about two years, said the items were deteriorating after nearly five years in storage.

"It's a shame we couldn't return those memories to (the children's) families as we wanted to," Ogasawara said.

Still a lot of unusable schools

February 4, 2016

55 schools still unusable in 3/11 disaster-hit prefectures

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201602040064>

By SATORU SEMBA/ Staff Writer

Fifty-five public elementary schools and junior high schools in the three prefectures hardest hit by the March 2011 disaster remain unusable, including 30 around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The schools in the northeastern prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima have been operating **interim schools** elsewhere since the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami struck the Tohoku region and set off the nuclear accident at the Fukushima plant.

Kumamachi Elementary School in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, is located about 3 kilometers from the plant in an area designated as difficult-to-return zone because of high radiation levels.

In December, an Asahi Shimbun reporter wearing a protective suit visited the school with a town resident who had temporarily returned to the area.

The schoolyard was covered in grass that was so tall it almost concealed the soccer goals. Footprints of wild animals were also seen.

Satchels and other school goods were scattered on the floor of a classroom seen through a window. These items were apparently left behind when the town was evacuated as the nuclear disaster unfolded in 2011. Before the triple meltdown at the plant, 333 pupils were enrolled at the school.

Since the disaster, the school has run classes at a rented room of a former school in Aizu-Wakamatsu, Fukushima Prefecture. Only 23 children attend classes at the new school.

Emperor to visit Fukushima in March

February 5, 2016

Emperor, Empress to visit 2011 disaster-hit Fukushima, Miyagi in March

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/02/05/national/emperor-empress-visit-2011-disaster-hit-fukushima-miyagi-march/#.VrSVuKDMot>

JJI

Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko are planning to visit Miyagi and Fukushima, two of the three prefectures worst damaged by the massive earthquake and tsunami about five years ago, on March 16-18, sources said Thursday.

The Imperial Couple plan to travel to the two northeastern prefectures after attending a government-sponsored memorial ceremony in Tokyo on March 11 to mark the fifth anniversary of the disasters.

The Emperor and Empress will arrive in Fukushima on March 16 and have talks with those who experienced the disasters and move on to Miyagi within the day, the sources said. During their stay in Miyagi, the couple will visit a fisheries product firm in the town of Onagawa.

The couple are slated to attend the 2016 national athletic meet in Iwate, the remaining hardest-hit prefecture. It will be the first time since 2011 for the Imperial Couple to visit the three prefectures within a year.

End of free housing for "voluntary" evacuees

February 8, 2016

‘Voluntary’ Fukushima evacuees denounce end of free housing, new assistance plan

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201602080054>

By JUN SATO/ Staff Writer

The Fukushima prefectural government is maintaining its plan to terminate the free housing program for “voluntary” evacuees from the nuclear disaster despite a barrage of criticism and complaints expressed during an explanatory meeting.

Fukushima officials told the briefing session in Tokyo’s Nakano Ward on Feb. 7 that in April 2017, free housing will no longer be available to people who fled from homes located outside government-designated evacuation zones around the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Instead, the officials said, new assistance measures, including subsidies for moving and rent, will be offered.

Many of the 30 or so people in attendance, including evacuees, blasted the planned measures as insufficient.

“It just sounds like the prefectural government wants to make us return to the area as soon as possible and terminate the assistance,” one of them said. “Even though the nuclear accident has not yet come to an end, how can they say we should go back there?”

According to the prefectural government, **about 6,000 households** voluntarily evacuated to areas outside Fukushima Prefecture after the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant in March 2011. An estimated 5,700 voluntary evacuees were living in Tokyo in January this year.

Based on the Disaster Relief Law, the prefectural government has offered public housing and other free accommodations to nuclear evacuees regardless of whether their original homes were in state-designated evacuation zones.

The government is now moving to lift all evacuation orders around the nuclear plant except for certain areas where radiation levels are expected to remain high.

“We held discussions with the central government while taking the situation into consideration, and the central government agreed to extend the program to March next year,” a prefectural government official told the meeting. “It would be difficult to further extend the period.”

The new measures include up to 100,000 yen (\$853) in subsidies for moving expenses, as well as preferential treatment in relocating to prefectural government-run housing.

For low-income households who continue to live in private apartments and other housing as evacuees, the prefecture will cover half the monthly rent up to 30,000 yen for the first year and one-third of the rent up to 20,000 yen for the second year.

"We cannot live with a subsidy of 30,000 yen," one of the evacuees said at the meeting. "Do they understand the rent in Tokyo?"

A representative of Hinan Seikatsu o Mamoru Kai (group that protects evacuation life), which comprises evacuees living in areas around Tokyo, indicated that the proposed measures would put too much of a financial burden on many of the voluntary evacuees.

"Our biggest difficulty is the housing issue," he said. "We strongly demand that the prefectural government withdraw the termination of the free housing program."

Masaaki Matsumoto, chief of the prefectural government's Evacuees Support Division, defended the plan and said the government does not intend to force evacuees to return home.

"The environment in Fukushima is being prepared for people to live in," Matsumoto said. "By setting up the subsidy system, we also responded to those who want to continue their evacuation."

TEPCO expresses commitment to recovery work

February 8, 2016

TEPCO president pledges more disaster recovery work in Fukushima: interview

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160208/p2a/00m/0na/015000c>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) President Naomi Hirose expressed his renewed determination to commit to disaster recovery work in areas affected by the Fukushima nuclear crisis during a recent interview with the Mainichi Shimbun ahead of the fifth anniversary of the triple disaster.

"We'd like to work more than ever toward fulfilling our responsibility (over the nuclear disaster)," said Hirose as this March marks the fifth anniversary of the Fukushima nuclear meltdown. "It has been five years (since the disaster), but nearly 100,000 people still remain evacuated. Not only shall we work on compensation measures, but we'll make sure everything is in order at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, as any trouble (involving decommission work and the issue of treating contaminated water) would affect evacuation schedules and future plans (for the locals)."

Furthermore, **Hirose suggested the utility's plan to build renewable energy stations in the affected areas to create jobs for local residents.**

Meanwhile, Niigata Gov. Hirohiko Izumida maintains a tough stance on the restart of TEPCO's Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Nuclear Power Plant in Niigata Prefecture, claiming that examination and overall evaluation of the Fukushima disaster are required before putting the matter on the table.

Hirose told the Mainichi that the company will discuss details about what needs to be done with the Niigata governor and seek understanding from local residents over the restart of the idled nuclear plant. In regard to the deregulation of the electricity market set for April, Hirose emphasized that it should not be a simple price war as different electricity providers such as gas companies and oil wholesalers are entering the market and introducing new rates cheaper than TEPCO. He explained that **the utility would**

compete with other power providers by introducing services that encourage energy conservation, which will lead to reduced power consumption and help cut expenses spent on electricity.

Decommissioning: Local businesses preferred

February 10, 2016

Deal to protect jobs in scrapping nuclear reactors

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20160210_22.html

Feb. 10, 2016 - Updated 06:30 UTC+1

Regional officials in Japan are taking steps to ensure that work to decommission nuclear reactors in their prefecture go to local businesses.

Three reactors in Fukui Prefecture will be scrapped. They are, the No. 1 reactor at the Tsuruga nuclear power plant, and the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors at the Mihama plant.

The prefectural government expects to sign a deal with the plant operators Japan Atomic Power and Kansai Electric Power as early as Wednesday.

The agreement provides that local residents and businesses be considered for the decommissioning work.

It requires plant operators to take responsibility for safety issues concerning the management of nuclear waste and its impact on the environment.

Fukui Prefecture is the first municipality hosting nuclear facilities to reach such a deal. Officials were concerned about the loss of jobs and business associated with scrapping the reactors.

The Japanese government now limits the operation of reactors to 40 years, in principle, following the 2011 accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

NRA calls for more monitoring of radiation...

February 10, 2016

More radiation monitoring in evacuation areas

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Feb. 10, 2016 - Updated 12:11 UTC+1

Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority is planning to step up radiation monitoring in evacuation zones caused by the Fukushima Daiichi accident. **This is part of efforts to help residents return to the areas after radiation levels drop.**

In the wake of the 2011 accident the NRA now has about 3,000 radiation monitoring posts across Fukushima Prefecture.

The new policy was disclosed at its meeting on Wednesday.

It calls for setting up more monitoring posts in zones where evacuation orders have already been lifted or will be lifted in future.

The regulator says more information on radiation would promote the residents returning to the areas or be helpful for those who are considering returning.

The NRA plans to reduce the number of monitoring posts in other areas.

As for areas which received the highest doses of radioactive fallout from the crisis, it plans to introduce mobile monitoring facilities.

The regulator says it will finalize detailed plans after hearing from local governments and related central-government's ministries.

Chairman Shunichi Tanaka said there has been some lack of monitoring in some high-radiation zones. He notes he wants to focus on such areas because decontamination work may be changing the radiation levels in these places.

He also said he believes the state is responsible for creating an environment where people can return.

Handcraft and despair

February 13, 2016

In grief, former fisherman relentlessly builds crafts for son killed in tsunami

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201602130003

By MASAKAZU HIGASHINO/ Senior Staff Writer

OTSUCHI, Iwate Prefecture--Handcrafted butterflies, fish, flowers, dolls and other works cover the walls, windows and ceiling of a room in Tokuhiko Takezawa's home. So numerous are these colorful creations that they threaten to overwhelm the home's amenities.

But behind this dazzling display of craftsmanship and tenacity lies the continuing despair of the creator.

Takezawa, 82, has been building the crafts in an attempt to overcome his grief over the loss of his eldest son who was swept away by the tsunami that struck in 2011.

"I can be free from thoughts when I am creating them," Takezawa said.

The father, however, said he has still not come to terms with the death of Yasuhiko.

Yasuhiko, 49, who had an intellectual disability, was returning home by bus from a facility that provides jobs for disabled people when the Great East Japan Earthquake hit on March 11, 2011.

The bus was engulfed by the ensuing tsunami and later caught on fire. Only Yasuhiko's jaw bone was recovered from the wreckage.

Takezawa's misery continued long after the disaster.

Yasuhiko's sister, Shoko Kurosawa, 48, could no longer stand seeing her father so despondent. She suggested that he make handicrafts to take his mind off the tragedy.

Yasuhiko had enjoyed detailed work and made handicrafts at the home. The father took up the hobby and gathered shells, wood and other supplies.

Takezawa used to repair nets as a fisherman, so the crafts quickly multiplied under his dexterous hands.

He and his wife, Hime, 78, still feel that Yasuhiko is with them at their home.

They say "good morning" and "good night" to their son and set out his favorite foods on the dining table.

"Yasuhiko's mind remained that of a 3-year-old child," Takezawa said in the room filled with handicrafts.

"I believe he is delighted to see these creations."

Long-lasting "temporary"

February 12, 2016

Merchants stuck in prefab markets in sluggish recovery from 3/11 disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201602120061>

By NORIYOSHI OHTSUKI/ Senior Staff Writer

Around 90 percent of temporary markets set up in three prefectures devastated by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami still occupy prefabricated buildings due to poor sales almost five years later.

A survey by the Organization for Small & Medium Enterprises and Regional Innovation showed that sales are sluggish at the markets as an exodus of residents from the affected communities continues, and fewer visitors contributing to rebuilding efforts are shopping at them.

The survey covered markets with at least three shops, which totaled 68 in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures. The findings revealed that retailers still operate out of 62 markets there.

The remaining six sites, which are situated in Iwate and Miyagi prefectures, closed because owners set up shops in new locations on their own, or had folded their businesses.

The temporary markets were built to help the affected retailers resume operations under a 6.9 billion yen (\$61 million) project by the organization, a government-affiliated entity.

Their construction began in the summer of 2011 after the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and the Fukushima nuclear disaster struck northeastern Japan on March 11 that year.

After they were built, the prefab structures were handed over to local governments, which let proprietors occupy outlet spaces for free for five years at the request of the organization.

Today, a combined 669 shops operate at the 62 sites.

When the temporary markets opened, sales were stable, catering to a steady stream of volunteers and workers involved in rebuilding efforts.

But they have experienced lackluster sales over the past few years as the number of such visitors has declined and population drain from the stricken municipalities, most of them in rural areas, continues. Most shop operators are holding off from reopening their businesses in new locations due to a lack of funds.

Leaving the makeshift markets to set up their own shops elsewhere would mean that they would need to pay the rents on their own.

The central government initially set the ending date for the subsidies at five years after the prefab structures were erected.

But with most retailers still struggling, it will extend its small business owner program until the end of fiscal 2018 so that it can continue to fund work to move those businesses to new sites.

The prefabs have a maximum intended lifespan of 27 years, according to the Organization for Small & Medium Enterprises and Regional Innovation.

After five years have passed since the installation of the markets, local governments, which own the makeshift buildings, can charge rent to shop operators.

The organization said some local governments may proceed with requiring rent from this autumn.

National association of plaintiffs over 9,600 strong

February 13, 2016

Fukushima disaster plaintiffs form association

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Feb. 13, 2016 - Updated 14:25 UTC+1

Nearly 10,000 people suing the central government and an electric power firm in connection with the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster have formed their first national association.

Representatives of 21 plaintiff groups joined a rally in Tokyo on Saturday to launch the association representing more than 9,600 members. Next month marks 5 years since the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The groups are in class-action lawsuits to demand compensation from the state and Tokyo Electric Power Company over the accident.

The association plans to share information on the lawsuits.

It also intends to seek an extension of a free housing provision for voluntary disaster evacuees beyond March next year.

A co-representative of the association, Tokuo Hayakawa, said the accident deprived survivors of the right to live in their hometowns. He said he will join with the association members and fight until they win a victory.

Another co-representative Akiko Morimatsu said 5 years have passed since the accident, but that problems have yet to be solved. She added that the plaintiff groups will unite to claim that there will be no restoration without support for survivors.

Undersea debris within 20km off plant still there

February 15, 2016

Five years on, tsunami debris on ocean floor near Fukushima nuclear plant remains untouched

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/02/15/national/five-years-on-tsunami-debris-on-ocean-floor-near-fukushima-nuclear-plant-remains-untouched/#.VsGiVuaDmov>



The Fisheries Agency will continue to subsidize efforts by Fukushima Prefecture to remove tsunami-related debris from the ocean floor.

The newest tranche of cash will be used to lift vehicles, concrete blocks and smashed buildings from the seabed within 20 km of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

However, there is no agreement yet on where to dump it.

Fukushima fishermen are asking authorities to demarcate a trial fishing zone up to 10 km from the plant. This means removal of the debris is a pressing matter.

Waters within a 20-km radius from the plant were designated a no-go zone in April 2011, but restrictions were scaled back in stages and were lifted in May 2013.

In fiscal 2011, the Fukushima Prefectural government began sweeping debris from the ocean floor outside the 20 km zone. That year, 33,430 tons were removed, followed by 2,241 tons in fiscal 2012, 664 tons in fiscal 2013, and 213 tons in fiscal 2014.

The Fisheries Agency has subsidized the operation to the tune of about ¥4.8 billion up to fiscal 2014.

But undersea debris within 20 km of the plant remains untouched, due partly to the question of who should remove it.

Given the local fishermen's call to expand the trial fishing zone closer to the plant, the agency plans to speed up the removal of debris by giving the prefecture subsidies for it.

The prefectural government will now negotiate with municipalities over where to dump the debris, and that process may take time, according to prefectural officials.

Ports near the nuclear plant, including those of Tomioka and Ukedo, are still undergoing post-tsunami repairs. The next candidates are Manogawa port, north of the plant, and Hisanohama port to the south, but **their residents do not want potentially radioactive debris dumped in their backyards.**

“Even if we pull debris out of the water, it’s not easy to find a place for it,” a prefectural official said.

The official urged the central government to weigh in on where to put the debris.

Meanwhile, Fukushima fishermen hope to expand the trial fishing zone as early as next month.

An underwater conducted by the prefecture in 2013 confirmed that several houses, cars and tetrapods are lying on the ocean floor. The survey was unable to determine the total amount of debris within the 20 km area.

“Unless the debris is removed, fishing nets may be caught and the risk of accidents will rise,” said an official of the Soma-Futaba Fisheries Cooperative. “We want the debris removed soon.”

This section features topics and issues covered by the Fukushima Minpo, the largest newspaper in Fukushima Prefecture. The original article was published on Jan. 31.

Still diving for tsunami debris

February 17, 2016

Divers still removing tsunami debris in worst-hit prefectures

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/quake_tsunami/AJ201602170046

By TAKUYA ISAYAMA/ Staff Writer

OFUNATO, Iwate Prefecture--A rusty desk recovered from the seabed here speaks volumes of the cleanup task confronting volunteer divers as the fifth anniversary of the earthquake and tsunami disaster approaches.

"We intend to continue the work until we start seeing swarms of fish swimming amid seaweed that spreads like a forest," said diving instructor Hiroshi Sato, 41.

The native of Hanamaki, Iwate Prefecture, heads the Sanriku Volunteer Divers that was set up in April 2011. The group combs disaster-hit Sanriku coastal waters for household and office debris swept out to sea by the tsunami unleashed by the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011. A total of 4,000 divers have participated in the efforts.

Three members of Sanriku Volunteer Divers removed the desk from the floor at Sakihama fishing port here on Feb. 6.

According to one member, much of the debris near the port and fishing grounds has been cleared, although stuff that was buried often emerges after conditions at sea become rough.

The Environment Ministry in 2012 estimated that 5 million tons of debris were swept out to sea from the three hardest-hit prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima. It reckoned that about 70 percent of that sank to the seabed.

Scaling down plans for relocation

February 16, 2016

Housing relocation plans slashed in Tohoku disaster areas as costs skyrocket

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201602160057>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Many cities and towns hit hard by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami are scaling back plans to relocate homes to higher ground, mainly due to soaring construction costs.

A survey by The Asahi Shimbun revealed that over the past three years, there has been a 30-percent reduction in the planned number of homes to be built on higher ground or other areas in the three prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima, which were devastated by the massive tsunami five years ago.

Some residents in those areas have abandoned plans to rebuild their homes due to the high costs, while others have constructed new homes on their own because local governments are taking too long to prepare plots on the planned new sites.

Local municipalities had compiled plans to move entire neighborhoods as part of an overall strategy to return their communities to their former state. But with many residents of those communities being elderly and concerned about whether they can pay for the construction of new homes, those local governments have had to scale back their home construction plans.

According to statistics compiled by the Fire and Disaster Management Agency, about 125,000 homes were completely destroyed by the 2011 disaster in the three prefectures.

To prevent a recurrence in the event of a future disaster, the central and local governments have placed as a main pillar of their reconstruction plans the moving of residential neighborhoods to higher ground or further inland.

Some local governments have raised the foundations of plots to allow homeowners to rebuild on their former sites.

The Asahi study compared the latest plans announced by local governments with those the Reconstruction Agency compiled as of the end of December 2012 regarding plans to rebuild housing. The study covered 31 municipalities in the three prefectures.

The number of planned homes to be constructed in those municipalities had decreased to 19,707 from the 28,060 planned in 2012.

Eleven municipalities in Iwate Prefecture reduced the number of planned homes by 2,056, while 14 municipalities in Miyagi Prefecture slashed 5,610 homes from their plans, and six municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture cut their plans by 687 homes.

Land plots for home construction has been completed for 1,787 homes in Iwate, 3,461 in Miyagi and 634 in Fukushima. However, that total of 5,882 is only about 30 percent of the planned number according to the most recent plans.

According to Reconstruction Agency officials and local governments, many disaster victims have given up on plans to rebuild their own homes because of the higher construction costs. Factors behind the cost increases include a shortage in building materials and increased expenses for construction workers because of the huge demand to rebuild in the three prefectures.

The long time it has taken to prepare new land inland or on higher ground has also caused some disaster victims to rebuild their homes on their own rather than wait for the local government to provide the new land.

Local governments have also constructed rental units for disaster victims with assistance from the central government. Many senior citizens who have abandoned plans to rebuild their homes have moved into such units.

Enticing evacuees to go back

February 18, 2016

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201602180028

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

HIRONO, Fukushima Prefecture—Residents evacuated after the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011 are being enticed back with the opening of a long-awaited public shopping mall on March 5.

Town officials hope that the opening of the "Hirono Terrace" mall, delayed from August 2015 due to bad weather and construction issues, will encourage former residents now living elsewhere to return.

"This mall will be a driving force in our efforts to recover the Futaba area from the disaster," said Mayor Satoshi Endo at a news conference on Feb. 2.

Five years after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the nation's worst nuclear accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, located about 20 kilometers north of Hirono, about half of the town's 5,000 residents remain evacuated to the nearby city of Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, and elsewhere.

The new mall, located in front of the Hirono town office, includes a branch of major supermarket chain Aeon Co., a local housing reform company shop, a dry cleaner's and two restaurants.

The 545 million yen (\$4.54 million) construction cost was covered almost entirely by subsidies from the central government.

The Aeon supermarket will offer food, medicine and other everyday items.

"We plan for the supermarket to cater to local needs by listening to feedback from residents," said Yuho Iesaka, president of Aeon's in-house company overseeing its stores and shopping malls in the Tohoku region.

TEPCO ordered to compensate voluntary evacuees

February 19, 2016

TEPCO ordered to pay damages for voluntary evacuation from Fukushima

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160219/p2g/00m/0dm/021000c>

KYOTO (Kyodo) -- A Japanese court on Thursday ruled that the operator of the disaster-struck Fukushima Daiichi nuclear complex is liable for damages stemming from voluntary evacuation by residents in Fukushima Prefecture, believed to be the first ruling of its kind.

The Kyoto District Court ordered Tokyo Electric Power Co. to pay about 30 million yen (\$264,000) in damages to a couple in which the husband lost his job and developed mental illness after the family voluntarily fled in the wake of nuclear disaster triggered by a huge earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

The sum the court awarded to the couple in their 40s is also much bigger than the 11 million yen proposed by a government-established center to mediate out-of-court settlements for nuclear accident compensation.

The plaintiffs said the ruling "set an example that there is no need to give up when evacuees do not feel satisfied with the sum" presented by the dispute resolution center. The couple, who have evacuated to the city of Kyoto, sought about 180 million yen from TEPCO in the lawsuit filed in 2013.

According to the ruling, the husband was managing a company before he and his family fled Fukushima in the wake of the nuclear disaster. The husband then developed sleeping problems and suffered from depression before becoming unable to work around May 2011.

Presiding Judge Masayuki Miki determined that the nuclear accident "was one of the main reasons" that the husband suffered mental and other problems. He also found that the financial loss the couple faced was the consequence of the accident.

Of the amount TEPCO was ordered to pay, about 21 million yen in damages is associated with lost employment income and expenses due to evacuation, the ruling said.

Another 1.7 million yen is compensation for being "forced to move to a land with no ties with Fukushima Prefecture which they were familiar with," the court said, adding that they "lost a stable life."

During the triple reactor core meltdown disaster, residents living within 20 kilometers of the TEPCO nuclear plant and some areas beyond were ordered to evacuate. Many others also fled from their homes at their own discretion.

February 18, 2016

Court orders TEPCO to compensate evacuees

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Feb. 18, 2016 - Updated 12:30 UTC+1

A court has ordered Tokyo Electric Power Company to compensate 5 people who evacuated after the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

The Kyoto District Court issued the ruling on Thursday and told the utility to pay about 30 million yen, or over 260 thousand dollars.

The plaintiffs evacuated from Fukushima to Kyoto Prefecture and elsewhere on a voluntary basis.

They're seeking compensation of nearly 1.6 million dollars. They say they could not work since the accident due to insomnia, depression and other stress-related health problems.

The court said it's reasonable that the plaintiffs voluntarily evacuated, as information on the danger of the unprecedented disaster had not been revealed.

The court also said the plaintiffs had to evacuate from familiar surroundings and that this caused considerable stress and illnesses.

The firm says it will study the ruling in detail and deal with it sincerely.

In a first Tepco told to compensate couple for damage stemming from voluntary Fukushima evacuation

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/02/18/national/crime-legal/first-tepco-told-compensate-couple-damage-stemming-voluntary-fukushima-evacuation/#.VsX2bOaDmot>

Kyodo

The Kyoto District Court has ordered the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant to pay about ¥30 million to a couple for economic and health damage caused by the family's decision to voluntarily flee the radiation in Fukushima Prefecture.

The husband lost his job and developed a mental illness during the ordeal.

This is believed to be the first time that a court has found Tokyo Electric Power Co. liable for damages stemming from a voluntary evacuation after the plant's triple core meltdown, which was triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011.

The sum awarded is also far more than the ¥11 million proposed by a government-established center that mediates out-of-court settlements for nuclear accident compensation cases.

A lawyer for the plaintiffs, who are in their 40s, said the ruling "set an example that there is no need to give up when evacuees do not feel satisfied with the sum" presented by the dispute resolution center.

The couple — who had moved twice before settling down in the city of Kyoto in May 2011 — had sought ¥180 million in damages.

According to the written complaint, the husband became unable to work because he developed pleurisy (a respiratory disease) and depression after the evacuation. Their children also experienced emotional distress from being harshly treated by classmates because they came from Fukushima Prefecture.

After three reactors experienced meltdowns during the disaster, residents within 20 km of the nuclear plant and some areas beyond were ordered to evacuate. Many others also fled at their own discretion and remain in temporary housing.

Radioactivity in Miyagi has decreased

February 17, 2016

Levels of radioactive materials in Miyagi Pref. waste down to 1/3 of previous figures

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160217/p2a/00m/0na/021000c>

Follow-up readings of designated waste in Miyagi Prefecture, which includes radioactive materials from the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster, showed that the amount of waste that exceeded existing standards for the concentration of radioactive materials had decreased to about one-third of the previous figure, the Ministry of the Environment said on Feb. 17.

Shinji Inoue, state minister of the environment, relayed the news to Miyagi Gov. Yoshihiro Murai at the Miyagi Prefectural Government office. It is expected that there will be a resulting impact upon the plan for disposal sites for the waste within the prefecture, which is an issue that has run into difficulties.

State Minister Inoue commented, "It will be ideal if we can concentrate (the waste) at one single location within the prefecture." He indicated that three municipalities within the prefecture are being considered as possible candidate sites for construction (of the waste facility).

Designated waste is waste whose radiation levels exceed 8,000 becquerels per kilogram, and includes tainted rice straw. Some 3,404 metric tons of such waste is presently being temporarily stored within the prefecture on farmers' properties and other locations.

The follow-up measurements, which were conducted between August of last year and January of this year, revealed that the total amount of the waste whose radiation levels exceeded the existing standards had fallen to a total of 1,090 tons.

It is thought that the reduction is due to factors including the natural attenuation that has occurred along with the passage of time since the nuclear disaster.

The environment ministry announced this month that in cases where the concentration of radioactive substances within waste materials has decreased to a level below that of existing standards, such waste would be removed from the category of designated waste.

While the national government is responsible for the disposal of designated waste materials, it is possible for municipalities to dispose of the materials as regular waste once this designation has been lifted.

Amount of radioactive waste decreasing

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Feb. 17, 2016 – Experts say the concentration of radioactivity in waste from the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi accident will continue to drop significantly in Miyagi Prefecture, northeastern Japan.

State Minister of Environment Shinji Inoue conveyed the estimate to Miyagi Governor Yoshihiro Murai on Wednesday.

Inoue said the latest measurement shows that temporary storage sites in the prefecture hold 1,090 tons of waste contaminated with radioactive materials exceeding 8,000 becquerels per kilogram. The waste includes soil and rice straw.

The amount has decreased over time. It is about one-third of the initial amount of 3,404 tons.

An expert estimate sponsored by the Environment Ministry says the amount will drop to 252 tons in 2 years and to 38 tons in 20 years, about 1 percent of the initial figure.

The ministry says waste below the 8,000-becquerel-per-kilogram level can be treated as ordinary waste.

The estimate may affect the central government's plan to build a disposal site for contaminated waste in the prefecture.

The prefectural government plans to discuss the matter with municipalities by the end of March.

Taking individual circumstances of voluntary evacuees into account

February 19, 2016

Lawyer urges Fukushima evacuees to individually file suits against TEPCO

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160219/p2a/00m/0na/012000c>

A Kyoto District Court ruling on Feb. 18 that ordered Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) to pay a man in his 40s and his family redress for damages due to voluntary evacuation has drawn mixed reactions from voluntary evacuees and other parties. The ruling marked the first time that TEPCO, the operator of the disaster-stricken Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, was deemed responsible for damages stemming from voluntary evacuation by local residents.

The court ordered the utility to pay about 30 million yen in damages to the family from Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture, because the man -- the owner of multiple restaurants -- lost his job and developed

mental illness after voluntarily evacuating to Kyoto with his family in the wake of the nuclear disaster triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in March 2011. The compensation is much higher than about 11 million yen proposed by the government-backed alternative dispute resolution (ADR) procedures.

"We are relieved as (the compensation) will allow us to make a living for the time being, but with only such a limited amount we can't forecast our future prospects because my husband can't work (because of mental illness)," lawyer Kenichi Ido quoted the man's wife as commenting at a news conference after the ruling.

Ido is a former judge who, as the then presiding judge at the Kanazawa District Court, ordered a halt to the operation of the No. 2 reactor of the Shika Nuclear Power Plant in Ishikawa Prefecture in 2006. Ido said at his news conference, "It's a commendable ruling in that it accepted our key arguments. There are many voluntary evacuees who have been compelled to settle for small amounts of compensation by TEPCO. They should file suit individually."

According to people with knowledge of ADR-brokered compromise settlements involving voluntary evacuees, compensation standards set by TEPCO and the governmental Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation have been very strict, limiting redress to only 80,000 yen per adult and a labor incapacity period to six months. The Kyoto District Court's ruling raised redress to the man to 1 million yen.

Lawyer Naoto Akiyama, a member of the Daini Tokyo Bar Association who handles many ADR cases, praised the decision as "a ruling which offers hope to evacuees who moved voluntarily, reflecting individual circumstances without being bound to the standards." Masafumi Yokemoto, a professor of environmental policy at Osaka City University's Graduate School of Business who is familiar with the ADR issue, says, "It's unlikely for the central government and TEPCO to change the standards, but an accumulation of judgments in individual suits will be the key to substantially change the standards."

Evacuees from the Fukushima nuclear disaster have filed class action lawsuits across the country. Akiko Morimatsu, 42, co-leader of a national coalition of groups of plaintiffs in Fukushima nuclear disaster lawsuits, fled from Koriyama to Osaka with her two children. She says, "**The ruling is epoch-making for ordering a far bigger amount of compensation than the ADR norms by taking individual circumstances of voluntary evacuees into consideration. If many people raise their voices in the future, the reality of damages will come to light more clearly.**"

But she expressed her displeasure with the ruling in that it limited the reasonable period of voluntary evacuation to the end of August in 2012, saying, "**It's wrong because it's based on government propaganda.**" The ruling reflects a decision by the governmental Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation to set the deadline for local residents to continuously evacuate rationally, arguing there was not enough information about dangers from the nuclear disaster up until that deadline.

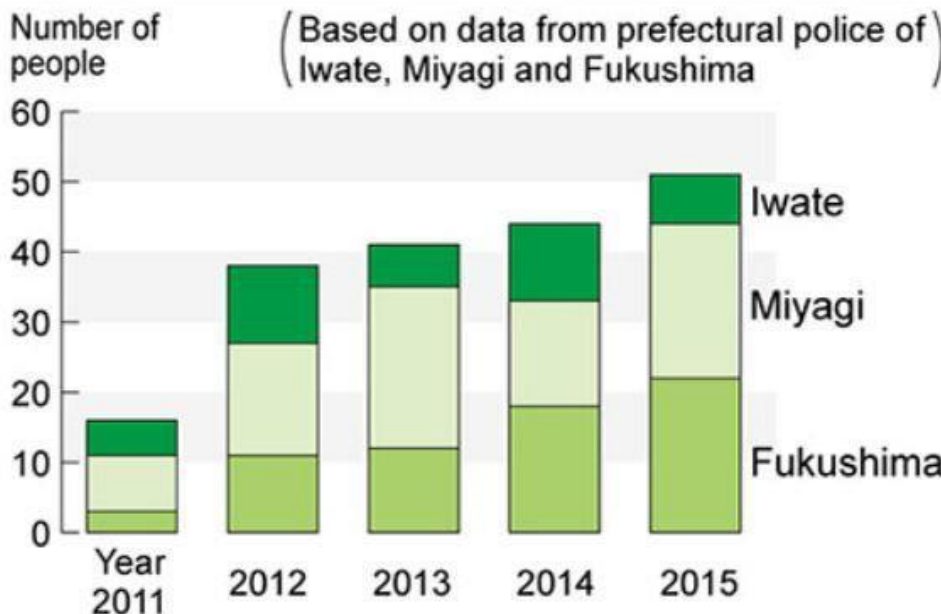
Dying alone in temporary housing

February 18, 2016

Solitary deaths rise again in temporary housing for Tohoku disaster victims

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201602180045

Number of people living alone who died in prefabricated temporary housing facilities



The Asahi Shimbun

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Fifty-one survivors of the 2011 triple disaster in the Tohoku region died alone in prefabricated temporary housing last year, continuing the incessant increase in such solitary deaths, an Asahi Shimbun survey showed Feb. 18.

Since the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster, 190 people have died solitary deaths in those facilities in the hardest-hit prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima. The death toll includes 16 in 2011, 38 in 2012, 41 in 2013, and 44 in 2014, according to the survey.

Of the total, 84 deaths were in Miyagi Prefecture, 66 in Fukushima Prefecture and 40 in Iwate Prefecture. The survey was based on interviews with police officials in the three prefectures about evacuees who died alone and whose bodies were later found in prefabricated temporary housing facilities.

An official of a social welfare council in Miyagi Prefecture said more people are dying alone because fewer residents are regularly checking in on their neighbors in temporary housing.

"As contact with neighbors has decreased, it has become difficult for neighbors to watch over them," the official said.

Of all 190 solitary deaths, 137, or 72.1 percent, were men. Eighty-one solitary deaths, or 42.6 percent of the total, involved people younger than 65 years old, the survey showed.

The death toll included suicides.

The temporary facilities are rent-free. Many evacuees from the disaster have relocated to other places, such as public housing for disaster victims, even though they must pay rent. Moves from temporary housing to public housing started to increase significantly in 2013.

The number of people still living in prefabricated temporary housing facilities halved from the peak to about 59,000 by the end of January this year.

But the number of deaths in these facilities has continued to rise.

"In areas damaged by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, people immediately started to watch over residents of temporary housing facilities based on lessons from the Great Hanshin Earthquake," said Yoshimitsu Shiozaki, specially invited professor of urban planning at Ritsumeikan University.

"The activities were effective. But there is a limit," he said.

In the five years after the Great Hanshin Earthquake devastated the Kobe area in January 1995, 233 people died solitary deaths in prefabricated temporary housing, according to Hyogo prefectural police. Shiozaki, who was engaged in reconstruction activities after the 1995 earthquake, also said a big problem in the Tohoku region is the loss of contact with those who live alone.

"Nearly five years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, and people who tend to be isolated from those around them remain in temporary housing facilities," he said. "In such a situation, the occurrence rate of solitary deaths is rising.

"A system should be established so that people pay attention to each other."

Solitary deaths could also become a problem in public housing in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures.

From 2000 to 2015, 897 people died alone in public housing for disaster victims of the Great Hanshin Earthquake, including those who were not victims of the temblor.

"Have we learnt nothing from Fukushima?"

February 18, 2016

Speakers raise issues haunting Fukushima in finance panel public hearing

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201602180062>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

KORIYAMA, Fukushima Prefecture--To a central government committee meeting here on Feb. 17, hotel operator Shoko Yamazaki aired out her frustrations at the restart of nuclear power plants in Japan.

"Nuclear power plants in the nation were restarted with very little thought when the nuclear crisis in Fukushima has not even been settled," said Yamazaki, whose hotel is in Aizuwakamatsu, Fukushima Prefecture. "Have we learned nothing from Fukushima?"

Yamazaki was one of the invited speakers who spoke of their concerns for a region still feeling the devastation caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster of March 2011 in the hearing held by the Lower House Budget Committee.

The prefecture was chosen for the second time since the catastrophe for the special regional hearing as "March 11 will be the fifth anniversary (of the disaster), a landmark year," said Wataru Takeshita, former reconstruction minister and head of the committee.

The opinions of four speakers recommended by both the ruling and opposition parties were heard at the hearing, which was held as part of the committee's budget deliberation for the upcoming fiscal year.

Hiromi Watanabe, one of the public speakers, said it was urgent that the region rid itself of bad publicity from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant crisis that unfolded in the wake of the earthquake and tsunami.

“It continues to haunt not just agriculture and tourism, but various industries as well,” said Watanabe, the head of the Fukushima Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

He also urged the central government to put a stop to population decline and improve transportation in the region.

Meanwhile, Hajimu Yamana, the chairman of the Nuclear Damage Compensation and Decommissioning Facilitation Corp., said, “Findings on the cause of the nuclear accident and studies on its effects on population migration can be considered research for the reconstruction of Fukushima. **It will become valuable information for the entire world.**”

Yoshiharu Saito, a senior member of the disaster victim support group Fukushima Fukko Kyodo Center (Fukushima reconstruction communal center), talked about the central government’s plan to lift the evacuation orders on all regions except “difficult-to-return zones” by March 2017.

“The wishes of residents who want to return home should be granted, but at the same time we hope for the central government to assist those who are unable to do so,” Saito said.

Consider plight of victims

February 20, 2016

EDITORIAL: Extent of suffering key to compensating Fukushima evacuees

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201602200024>

An estimated 100,000 or so people are still living as evacuees as a consequence of the catastrophic accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011.

This figure comprises about 18,000 evacuees who acted on their own initiative and fled from the 23 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture that are outside government-designated evacuation zones. They include people who lived in areas that are not covered by the government-supported compensation program.

The circumstances of their decisions to leave their hometowns are more or less similar to those of the people who fled from areas covered by the evacuation orders. Many of them were concerned about the health of their children or found it difficult to continue their businesses in the affected areas.

But compensation paid to these “voluntary evacuees” by Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the operator of the crippled nuclear plant, ranging from 120,000 yen to 720,000 yen (\$1,000 to \$6,400) per person, was far smaller than the amounts received by residents of the evacuation areas.

On Feb. 18, a local court handed down a ruling that may open the door to greater relief for these evacuees. The Kyoto District Court ordered TEPCO to pay about 30 million yen to a man and his wife for mental illnesses the husband suffered following their “voluntary evacuation” from the calamitous accident. The man, who is in his 40s, together with his wife and three children, filed a lawsuit against the utility seeking 180 million yen in damages, claiming he became unable to work because of mental and physical problems caused by the effects of the nuclear disaster.

Concerned about the possibility of his children’s exposure to radiation, the man decided to leave his home with his family. After they fled, the family stayed at hotels and lived in rented accommodation outside the prefecture.

As he had to live in unfamiliar surroundings, the man developed insomnia and depression. The district court acknowledged that the nuclear accident was the cause of these health problems.

Compensation payments to such voluntary evacuees are based on guidelines set by a central government panel addressing disputes over compensation for nuclear accidents. The guidelines say compensation payments should be based on three factors: increases in living expenses due to evacuation, mental damages and expenses incurred in fleeing and returning home.

TEPCO had paid a total of 2.92 million yen to the family based on the guidelines, but the family claimed the compensation was insufficient.

In its ruling, the district court argued that the guidelines only show “items and scope of damages that can be classified according to type.”

The ruling showed the view that damages with a causal link to the accident should be compensated for according to the circumstances involved. The basic principle for compensation espoused by the ruling is that the amounts of damages to be paid should be determined according to the circumstances of individual cases instead of being uniform and fixed.

Compensation payments to victims of the nuclear disaster, such as evacuees and affected businesses, come out of a 9 trillion yen treasure chest provided by the government to TEPCO.

With its management priority placed on its own early recovery from the consequences of the accident, however, the electric utility has been trying to terminate the payments as soon as possible and keep the amounts within the framework set by the guidelines. The company’s compensation policy has been criticized for failing to make the benefit of residents a primary consideration.

About 10,000 evacuees are involved as plaintiffs in damages suits filed with 21 district courts and branches around the country. This points to the high level of discontent with the compensation payments that have been paid out.

TEPCO should respond with appropriate sincerity to the demands of victims entitled to compensation and review its compensation policy and procedures.

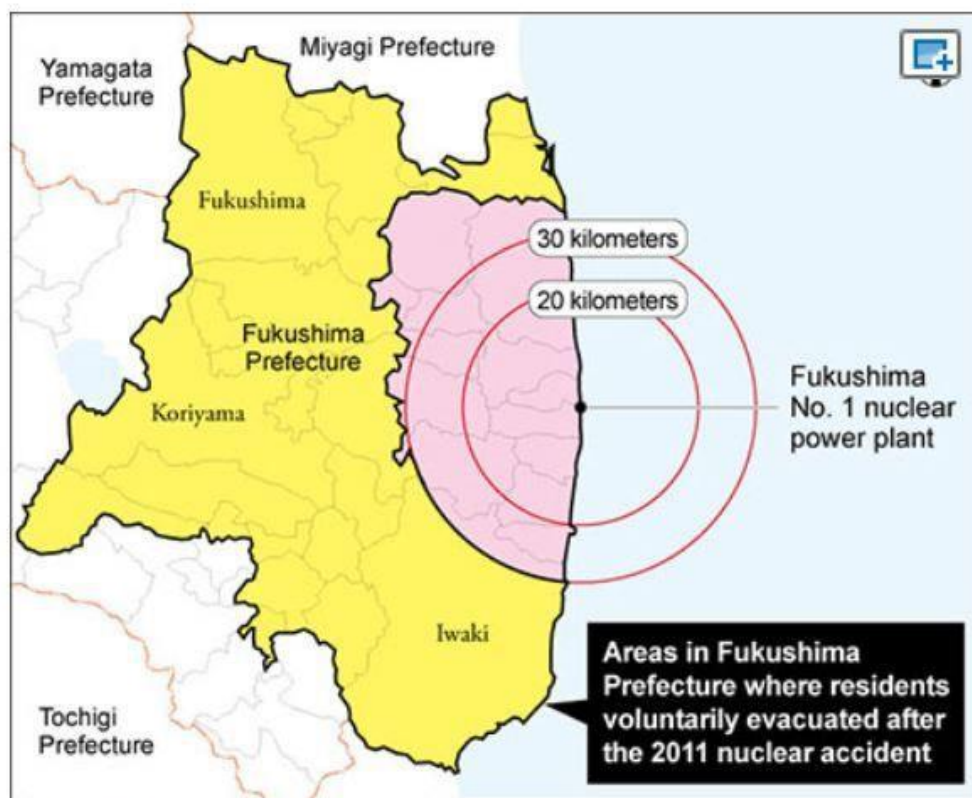
The courts that are hearing these cases should hand down rulings that give sufficient consideration to the plight of the victims.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Feb. 20

February 19, 2016

TEPCO ordered to pay couple who 'voluntarily' fled Fukushima after nuclear disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201602190066>



The Asahi Shimbun

By YUTO YONEDA/ Staff Writer

KYOTO--The Kyoto District Court ordered Tokyo Electric Power Co. to pay 30.46 million yen (\$267,000) to a couple for mental illnesses the husband suffered following their “voluntary evacuation” from the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

The district court’s unprecedented ruling on Feb. 18 said the accident at TEPCO’s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant contributed to the insomnia and depression the husband developed after his family fled Fukushima Prefecture in 2011.

Although the plaintiffs did not live in a government-designated evacuation zone around the plant, the court said evacuating voluntarily is “appropriate when the hazard from the accident and conflicting information remained.”

The ruling was the first to award damages to voluntary evacuees, according to a private group of lawyers involved in lawsuits against TEPCO and the central government over the nuclear disaster.

The man, who is in his 40s, his wife and three children were seeking a total of 180 million yen against TEPCO.

According to the ruling, the husband and wife had managed a company that operated restaurants in Fukushima Prefecture. The family fled their home a few days after the nuclear accident started in March 2011 and moved to Kyoto in May that year.

The court acknowledged the man suffered severe mental stress because he had to leave his hometown and quit his position as representative of the company.

TEPCO had paid a total of 2.92 million yen to the family based on the central government’s compensation standards for residents who evacuated on their own.

The utility argued that its payments were appropriate because they were based on guidelines set by a central government panel addressing disputes over compensation for nuclear accidents. The guidelines dictate uniform and fixed payments for residents who left areas outside designated evacuation zones. However, the district court said these guidelines “simply show a list of damages that can be broken down and the scope of damages.”

The court concluded that compensation amounts should instead reflect the personal circumstances of evacuees in nuclear accident-related cases.

It ordered TEPCO to compensate the couple for the period through August 2012, when radiation levels dropped to a certain level and information on the nuclear accident became more stable and accurate. Specifically, the court said the husband and wife are entitled to part of the monthly remuneration of 400,000 yen to 760,000 yen they had received each for having to suspend their business following the nuclear accident.

But the court dismissed the damage claims of the couple’s three children, saying their compensation was already covered by TEPCO’s payments.

About 10,000 evacuees are involved in 21 damages suits filed in Fukushima Prefecture, Tokyo, Osaka and elsewhere.

An estimated 18,000 people from Fukushima Prefecture are still living in voluntary evacuation, according to the prefectural government.

All victims of nukes unite!

February 20, 2016

Hibakusha: Hiroshima 'black rain' victim encouraged by plaintiff in Fukushima class action case

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160220/p2a/00m/0na/022000c>

At the end of January, just after a spell of cold weather had swept across the Japanese archipelago, Seiji Takato checked a freshly printed newsletter he had been working on at his office in Hiroshima. He appeared satisfied. The newsletter contained a message from Ruiko Muto, the head of a group of plaintiffs seeking criminal prosecution of parties including Tokyo Electric Power Co. over the leak of radioactively contaminated water from the utility's crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant into the ocean.

The 75-year-old former high school biology teacher and his acquaintances decided to publish the newsletter to show support for a group of 64 people who had filed a class action lawsuit against the Hiroshima prefectural and municipal governments. **The 64 plaintiffs were demanding that those who were showered with "black rain" (rain mixed with fallout) in the wake of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima on Aug. 6, 1945, be recognized as A-bomb sufferers and be given handbooks that would enable them to receive health care benefits.**

For the first issue of the newsletter, Takato, a black rain victim himself, included a piece by Muto.

"The case you have brought to the court is a very important lawsuit for Fukushima that deals with health damage caused by exposures to low doses of radiation. ... Let's join hands in a fight to protect all lives from nuclear threats," reads Muto's message.

Takato has paid attention to the government's designation of evacuation areas around the Fukushima plant and the lifting of evacuation orders after the nuclear disaster, and he felt similarities with the handling of black rain, as authorities drew lines between the zones where people would be recognized as hibakusha and other areas. The health damage caused by exposure to radiation cannot be determined with sharp lines like those on a map.

"I always think about Fukushima," Takato says. He asked Muto to write a piece for the newsletter via a mutual acquaintance.

In the course of meeting with Fukushima evacuees who had left their hometowns to come to Hiroshima and in talking with them on multiple occasions over the past five years, Takato sensed a perception among evacuees that evacuation was a bad thing. He was reminded of the resigned look on black rain sufferers' faces when he launched a local victims' association in 2002.

"We are just waiting to die," one of the black rain victims said at the time.

Takato was encouraged by Muto's words calling for cooperation among victims of nuclear weapons and nuclear catastrophes.

Takato met with those who had been hurt by the use of nuclear technology at the World Nuclear Victims Forum in Hiroshima in November last year. The backgrounds of participants varied, from those who had suffered from nuclear tests, to sufferers of nuclear plant accidents and uranium mining.

"(The forum) reinforced my resolve to eliminate all nuclear technology from the Earth," Takato said.

In the A3-size, one-page newsletter, Takato included details of the Hiroshima case and voices from plaintiffs. He is one of the plaintiffs and also acts as the secretariat chief for a black rain victims' association that backs the plaintiffs. Even though he fell ill from overwork after the turn of this year, Takato continued to work on the publication.

The 4,000 copies of the newsletter will be sent out to peace organizations and supporters across Japan.

"I want to call for support from outside Hiroshima as well," Takato says.

Muto's acknowledgment of Takato's activities has given him hope to fight in a long battle to end Japan's history of neglecting victims of nuclear technology.

(This is the final installment of a five-part series)

What future for Fukui?

February 21, 2016

As residents and reactors age, Fukui's fortunes fade

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/02/21/national/politics-diplomacy/as-residents-and-reactors-age-fukuis-fortunes-fade/#.VsmHS-aDmot>

by Eric Johnston
Staff Writer

OSAKA – On a gray winter day late last month alternating between rain and sleet, many in the Sea of Japan town of Takahama, Fukui Prefecture, were feeling sunny. For the restart of Kansai Electric Power Co.'s

Takahama plant No. 3 reactor means not only a return to nuclear power, but **a return of the money stream that flows from it.**

Since 1970, Fukui has been the home of the largest concentration of nuclear power plants in Japan — and possibly the world — hosting a total of 13 commercial reactors.

For the past 4½ decades, the plants, spread across the towns of Tsuruga, Mihama, Takahama and Oi, provided **local employment and an array of other benefits.**

When the reactors were shut down every 13-16 months for routine inspections, it was a bonanza for local businesses.

A flood of Kepco employees, safety inspectors and nuclear-power related specialists arrived, filling up local hotels and spending money in area cafes, restaurants and bars.

At the same time, the plants provided numerous part-time jobs for local farmers and fishermen who wanted to supplement their incomes.

Many of these jobs were hard, dirty and dangerous, but welcomed.

Of course, there were also the guaranteed subsidies from the central government that came with hosting the plants — money used to build civil engineering infrastructure and sway public opinion.

Elderly Fukui residents recall that, 40 years ago, it was not unheard of for the central government and Kepco to subsidize “nuclear power study tours” for select local leaders and citizens, whisking them away to countries embracing atomic energy such as France.

But even with the Takahama No. 3 reactor’s restart after sitting idle for years since the March 2011 Fukushima disaster — and with No. 4 waiting in the wings to be rebooted despite a radioactive water leak announced Saturday — Fukui still faces an **uncertain economic future.**

Earlier this month, Kepco announced decommissioning plans for the Nos. 1 and 2 reactors at its Mihama plant and Japan Atomic Power Co. announced plans for scrapping the No. 1 reactor at its Tsuruga plant. By 2024, JAPC intends to have removed all fuel from the Tsuruga reactor, and plans to finish tearing down the reactor itself and its associated facilities by 2039. Kepco also announced plans to begin decommissioning its Mihama reactors in the next fiscal year, and expects the work to take three decades. The Tsuruga reactor’s decommissioning will take place in three stages, and is expected to cost just over ¥36 billion. Decommissioning at Kepco’s Mihama reactors is expected to total ¥68 billion.

For local governments, decommissioning presents a dilemma. On the one hand, there is the issue of safety, especially the disposal of high-level radioactive material, where **pressure is on the utilities to clean up quickly.**

“We don’t want JAPC to fixate on a schedule for the spent fuel, but, rather get rid of it as soon as possible,” said Tsuruga Mayor Takanobu Fuchikami, following the announcement.

On the other hand, **even decommissioning work offers the possibility of local employment.**

However, like the rest of the country, Fukui’s workforce is aging rapidly, raising questions about who will do the often gruelling and dangerous work.

A prefectural survey released in January 2015 showed that two-thirds of the workers in Tsuruga, Mihama, Takahama and Oi were employed in the waterworks, gas and utility, and the service industries. The same survey also revealed that between 23 and 29 percent of workers in each of the four cities were over the age of 65.

Alarmed at the aging population and worried they will be abandoned, local leaders in Fukui are trying to convince the central government that it must take care of the local economy, and not just the nuclear plants.

"After the reactors have finished operating, what's necessary is not simply to think about decreasing subsidies, but to pass new laws and create a new framework for local industrial revitalization," Fukui Gov. Issei Nishikawa told central government officials.

The extent, and speed, of economic assistance will at least partially depend on Fukui's political power in the halls of the Diet — and Fukui does have powerful friends in Tokyo.

Liberal Democratic Party policy chief Tomomi Inada, a right-wing heavyweight and close aide to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, represents Fukui's No. 1 district — the one without nuclear power plants, including the city of Fukui.

There, the major political concern is not nuclear power subsidies but whether Inada can use her influence to get the Hokuriku Shinkansen Line extended from Kanazawa, Ishikawa Prefecture, to the city of Fukui by 2020, cutting travel time to Tokyo via Nagano just in time for the Tokyo Olympics.

Meanwhile, Abe's minister for reconstruction in the Tohoku region, and the man in charge of coordinating policy for revival after the Fukushima nuclear disaster, is Tsuyoshi Takagi, who represents Fukui's No. 2 district, home to all of its power plants.

But with Fukui's reactors aging as fast, if not faster, than its population, the amount of economic assistance required to both care for the elderly and keep the local economy going is likely to increase.

Scrapping more reactors will surely be a necessity in the coming years, as the Takahama Nos. 3 and 4 reactors are now over 30 years old.

While such work will bring a steady stream of income to the services industries, officials and residents within Fukui are well aware it will not bring back the economic glory days when Fukui was known nationwide as Japan's *Genpatsu* (nuclear power) *Ginza*.

Kansai Perspective appears on the fourth Monday of each month, focusing on Kansai-area developments and events of national importance with a Kansai connection.

Lifting evacuation orders doesn't erase radiation concerns

February 20, 2016

Gov't to lift evacuation order for Minamisoma, but radiation concerns linger

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160220/p2a/00m/0na/021000c>

The government has unveiled a plan to lift a nuclear evacuation order for the Fukushima Prefecture city of Minamisoma by the end of April, paving the way for more than 10,000 residents to return to their hometown, though some evacuees remain concerned about radiation levels in the area.

The government's on-site nuclear disaster response headquarters, led by State Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Yosuke Takagi, revealed the plan on Feb. 19. It will be the first time for the evacuation order for a "restricted residency zone" to be lifted since the onset of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster in March 2011. The evacuation order, however, will remain in place for a "difficult-to-return zone" in Minamisoma that is home to a household of two residents.

Minamisoma is now set to become the fourth area to have its evacuation order lifted after the Miyakoji district of the Fukushima Prefecture city of Tamura, the eastern part of the prefectural village of Kawauchi, and the prefectural town of Naraha. Among the four areas, Minamisoma has the largest population subject to the lifting of an evacuation order.

A "restricted residency zone" is an area where residents are essentially prohibited from staying overnight due to high annual radiation doses of over 20 millisieverts but no more than 50 millisieverts. The government introduced the zone when it began realigning evacuation areas in April 2012 under three types of evacuation orders in accordance with radiation levels. The "restricted residency zone" is equivalent to level 2 in the three-tiered classification.

At a meeting of the Minamisoma Municipal Assembly on Feb. 19, the government's on-site headquarters presented documents showing that yearly radiation doses in the city have dropped to 20 millisieverts or less through decontamination efforts, indicating that evacuation orders can be lifted. "Once the conditions are met, we will start preparations to lift the evacuation order by the end of April," an official with the on-site government task force told the meeting. The task force will begin holding briefing sessions for residents on Feb. 20 to seek their understanding.

After the meeting, Minamisoma Mayor Katsunobu Sakurai said, "I will decide whether to accept the central government's plan once the municipal government confirms the completion of decontamination work." Mayor Sakurai suggested that the lifting of the evacuation order may take place sometime after the "Golden Week" holiday period is over in early May as it will take some time to gain residents' understanding regarding the plan.

Evacuation orders will be lifted in what are known as "zones preparing for the lifting of evacuation orders" in the Odaka and Haramachi districts of Minamisoma, which are home to 3,536 households. They will also be lifted in a "restricted residency zone" in the Odaka district, which is home to 126 households. The population of people registered in both zones totaled 11,663 as of the end of September last year. According to the municipal government, a program allowing residents to stay overnight was introduced in August 2015 as part of preparations for the lifting of the evacuation order, but only 1,600 residents had signed up for the program as of Jan. 27 this year. Among them, about 30 percent -- mainly households of elderly residents -- are believed to have actually stayed over at their homes in Minamisoma. When it comes to the "restricted residency zone," only a few households have thus far stayed overnight in the city - a clear indication of lingering concerns about radiation levels among evacuees.

As almost five years have passed since the outbreak of the nuclear crisis, many residents have settled down in their evacuation destinations after landing jobs or building new homes. The municipal government presumes that about 90 percent of residents will not return to their hometown for a while even after the evacuation order is lifted.

Meanwhile, the central government is currently making arrangements with local governments to lift the evacuation orders for the "restricted residency zone" and the "zone preparing for the lifting of evacuation orders" simultaneously in the Fukushima Prefecture town of Kawamata and the village of Katsurao sometime in the near future.

Ex-fishermen claim compensation for exposure to radiation

February 22, 2016

Ex-fishers claiming fallout exposure seek benefits

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20160222_11.html

Feb. 22, 2016 - Updated 04:29 UTC+1

A group of Japanese citizens is seeking insurance benefits, claiming they and their family members were exposed to fallout from US nuclear tests in the Pacific while fishing more than 60 years ago.

The United States conducted hydrogen bomb tests on the Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands in 1954.

In a widely reported case, 23 crew members of the Fukuryu Maru Number 5 fishing boat were working in the area when the fallout occurred. One died 6 months later. They were paid relief money.

The 7 former fishermen and bereaved relatives now seeking workmen's compensation say they were on other boats at the time.

A citizens' group said on Sunday the men suffered cancer and other illness due to exposure from the same nuclear testing.

The group says the former fishermen from Kochi Prefecture plan to apply for mariners' insurance benefits on Friday.

The group says their seaman's pocket ledgers will confirm they were working in waters surrounding the Bikini Atoll at the time.

It also says statements by doctors who have analyzed their medical certificates show clear links between the exposure and their diseases.

If the connection is determined, their past treatment cost would be covered by the mariners insurance. They will also be eligible for an increase in their pension payments.

83-year-old Yutaka Kuwano in Kochi City is one of the former crewmembers. He says he was 21 when he saw black ashes falling like snowfalls while working near the Bikini Atoll.

Kuwano has had nose bleeds, an abnormal increase in the number of white blood cells and other symptoms since the incident. He had surgery after being diagnosed with stomach cancer 12 years ago.

Kuwano says boats and tuna catches were tested for radiation when they returned to Japan, but his crew wasn't checked. He says he hopes other former fishermen will be able to receive relief measures if his approval comes through.

February 21, 2016

Fishermen want workers' comp for diseases allegedly linked to 1954 U.S. H-bomb tests

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201602210032

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Former fishing boat crew members who developed cancer or heart diseases after being exposed to fallout from U.S. nuclear tests in the Pacific will apply for mariners insurance benefits more than 60 years after their exposure.

If their illnesses are found to be related to doses of radiation, the benefits will be effectively treated as workmen's compensation.

The planned claims involve five former crew members in their 80s and two relatives of the deceased fishing boat workers in Kochi Prefecture, according to the center for supporting victims of nuclear tests in the Pacific, a citizens' group based in Sukumo, Kochi Prefecture.

The number may rise by several other claimants, according to the group.

The United States conducted 67 hydrogen bomb tests on the Bikini Atoll and Enewetak Atoll in the Marshall Islands from 1946 to 1958.

The Japanese government acknowledged that a crew of 23 aboard the No. 5 Fukuryu Maru tuna trawler was extensively exposed to fallout from a hydrogen bomb test on March 1, 1954. One of them died of an acute radiation injury six months later.

But it was the only case the government certified as falling victims to the U.S. nuclear testing.

The new claims will be filed with the Japan Health Insurance Association.

The claimants reportedly suffered from cancer, cerebral infarctions and other illnesses.

If their diseases were determined as being linked to their radiation exposure, their treatment costs will be covered.

Families of the deceased workers will be eligible to collect a survivor annuity.

One of the five former crew members showed a dose of up to 414 millisieverts during a check of his teeth for radiation exposure, according to Shin Toyoda, professor of radiation doses assessment at Okayama University of Science.

The figure is tantamount to the level survivors experienced from being within 1.6 kilometers from ground zero when the atomic bomb detonated above Hiroshima in 1945, Toyoda added.

There also exist the results of blood tests of other crew members from that time, showing a decline in their white cells.

Still, experts say that even if the scope of their radiation doses was established, it will be difficult to definitively conclude that their exposure from decades ago is responsible for the diseases they have incurred or their deaths.

It may be concluded that their current health conditions resulted from their lifestyles or other factors, they say.

Masatoshi Yamashita, who heads the secretariat of the center for supporting victims of nuclear tests in the Pacific, urged the public to pay heed to people who have never had access to relief measures despite their radiation exposure.

"At a time when we are asked whether we can live side by side with nuclear power in the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, the entire society needs to share an understanding of what happened in the Marshall Islands," Yamashita, 71, said.

After the No. 5 Fukuryu Maru fishing boat suffered exposure to fallout from the hydrogen bomb test, two former crew members and relatives of five former crew members became eligible for mariners' insurance benefits.

But the government did not examine the cases of other fishermen who worked near the test sites in March and the following months that year.

A total of 1,000 vessels passed near the testing sites from March to May, including 270 that are believed to have sailed from Kochi Prefecture.

Hajime Kikima, a 71-year-old doctor who operates a clinic in Hamamatsu who has assisted former fishermen with exposure from the nuclear tests, called on the insurer to grant benefits to the claimants.

"They should be certified as eligible for insurance benefits since there is the fact that they were exposed to radiation and that they suffer from diseases whose causes are suspected to be linked to radiation," he said. (This article was written by Naomi Nishimura and Tatsuya Sato.)

10 officially recognised as A-bomb survivors

February 23, 2016

Court orders Nagasaki to recognize 10 people as A-bomb survivors

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160223/p2g/00m/0dm/002000c>

A lawyer holds a banner reading "partial lawsuit victory" outside the Nagasaki District Court in Nagasaki, on Feb. 22, 2016. (Mainichi)

NAGASAKI (Kyodo) -- The Nagasaki District Court accepted on Monday the claims of 10 plaintiffs seeking official recognition as atomic-bomb survivors eligible for special assistance.

- **【Related】** 10 newly recognized by Nagasaki court as official A-bomb survivors, others to appeal

The 10 individuals were among 161 plaintiffs who argued they experienced the wartime U.S. atomic bombing of the southwestern Japanese city on Aug. 9, 1945, within a 12-kilometer radius of ground zero. The plaintiffs are defined as individuals "who experienced the bombing," not hibakusha atomic-bomb survivors who are provided with health books and entitled to full compensation including medical assistance.

The plaintiffs failed to receive such recognition as they were outside the oval-shaped, state-designated zone stretching around 7 km from east to west and about 12 km from north to south. The ruling is the first to order the issuance of health books for such people, according to the plaintiffs' lawyers.

In the suit, the plaintiffs sought that the prefectural and city governments issue the health books so they can receive assistance under the law for support for atomic-bomb survivors.

In the ruling, Presiding Judge Takayuki Matsubasa said, "People who were exposed to radiation stemming from the atomic bomb more than 10 times higher than that in the natural world could suffer damage to health."

The court examined estimated dosage figures submitted by the plaintiffs and determined that only the 10 plaintiffs can be recognized to have received the levels of radiation, the judge said.

The health ministry, meanwhile, said in a statement, "As we are examining the contents (of the ruling), we will decide how to respond by consulting with relevant ministries, and the Nagasaki prefectural and city governments."

The Nagasaki District Court rejected a suit by 395 other plaintiffs who filed a similar suit in 2012, prompting them to appeal to the Fukuoka High Court.

What price for Fukushima mothers?

February 23, 2016

For some Fukushima mothers, protecting children from radiation comes at heavy price

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201602230068>

By NATSUKI EDOGAWA/ Staff Writer

Three-and-a-half years after fleeing to central Japan, a mother received a package from her husband who had opted to remain at their home in Fukushima Prefecture despite the nuclear disaster.

From Tamura, about 35 kilometers west of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, the father sent snacks for the couple's two children. The cardboard box also contained divorce papers.

"I cannot send money to my family whom I cannot see," the husband told his wife.

She still refused to return home.

Thanks to decontamination work, radiation levels have fallen around the nuclear plant since the triple meltdown caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in March 2011. And families are returning to their hometowns, trying to resume normal lives.

But many mothers, distrustful of the government's safety assurances, still harbor fears that radiation will affect the health of their children. As a result of these concerns, families are being torn apart, friendships have ended, and a social divide remains wide in Fukushima communities.

Around 70,000 people are still not allowed to return to their homes located in evacuation zones designated by the central government. And an estimated 18,000 people from Fukushima Prefecture whose homes were outside those zones remain living in evacuation.

The government is pushing for Fukushima residents to return home and trying to counter false rumors about the nuclear disaster.

More families in Fukushima Prefecture are willing to buy food produced in the prefecture--but not all.

A 40-year-old mother who once lived on the coast of Fukushima Prefecture and moved farther inland to Koriyama said she still fears for the health of her 11-year-old daughter.

Her classmates started serving "kyushoku" school lunches containing Fukushima rice and vegetables that passed the screening for radioactive materials. But the fifth-grader has instead eaten from a bento lunch box prepared by her mother.

The daughter says that eating her own lunch led to teasing from her classmates. She heard one of them say behind her back: "You aren't eating kyushoku. Are you neurotic?"

She does not talk to that classmate anymore, although they used to be friends.

"I now feel a bit more at ease even when I am different from other students," the daughter said.

Her mother expressed concerns about her daughter's social life, but protecting her child's health takes precedence.

"My daughter may fall ill sometime," the mother said. "I feel almost overwhelmed by such a fear."

An official of the Fukushima prefectural board of education said a certain number of students act differently from other students because of health concerns over radiation.

"Although the number is limited, some students bring bento to their schools," the official said. "Some students wear surgical masks when they participate in footraces during outdoor school athletic meets.

“The feelings toward radiation vary from person to person, so we cannot force them (to behave in the same way as other students).”

Sung Woncheol, a professor of sociology at Chukyo University, and others have conducted surveys on mothers whose children were 1 to 2 years old when the nuclear disaster started. The mothers live in Fukushima city and eight other municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture.

Of the 1,200 mothers who responded to the survey in 2015, 50 percent said they had concerns about child-rearing in Fukushima Prefecture.

Nearly 30 percent said they avoid or try to avoid using food products from Fukushima Prefecture, compared with more than 80 percent six months after the disaster.

But for some mothers, the passage of nearly five years since the disaster unfolded has not erased their fears of radiation.

The 36-year-old mother who received the divorce papers from her husband in autumn 2014 continues to live with her children in the central Japan city to which she had no previous connection.

A month after the nuclear disaster, she fled with her then 1-year-old son and her daughter, 10, from their home, even though it was not located in an evacuation zone.

She said she left Fukushima Prefecture because she “could not trust the data released by the central government.”

The mother still has not told her children that their parents are divorced.

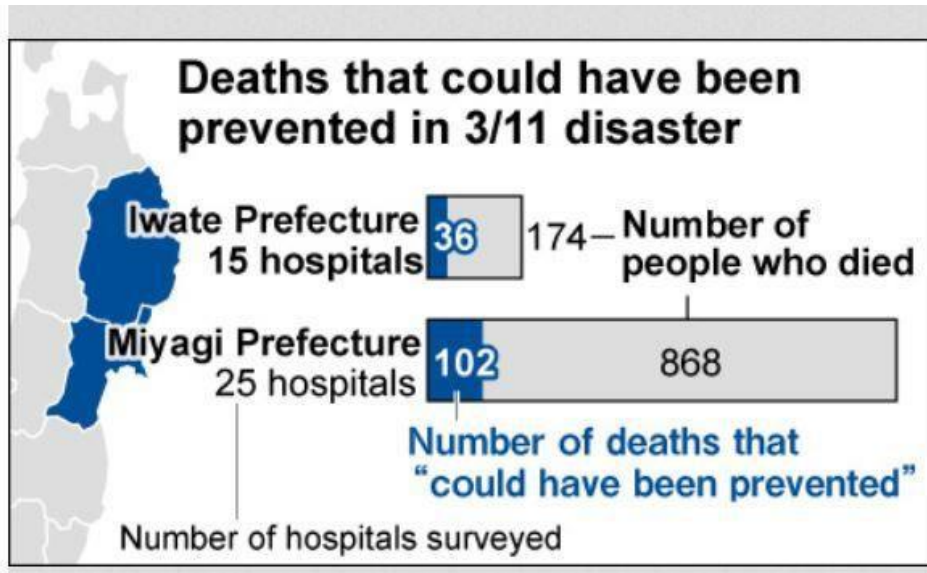
“I believe I could protect the health of my children,” the woman said. “But my family has collapsed.”

Unnecessary deaths after 3/11

February 25, 2016

Survey: 138 hospital deaths were preventable in 3/11 aftermath

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201602250041



By TOMOYO FUKUMIYA/ Staff Writer

Shortages of doctors, nurses and medicines and insufficient availability of artificial respirators after the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami led to 138 preventable deaths at hospitals in Iwate and Miyagi prefectures.

The deaths could have been avoided if the medical institutions had given the victims those conventional medical services, a health ministry survey showed on Feb. 24.

To prevent similar deaths in future disasters, the research team that conducted the survey proposed that hospitals should routinely make preparations to maintain medical services in the event of a disaster. The survey covered 1,042 people who died at 40 hospitals in the two prefectures within about three weeks after the earthquake hit their areas on March 11, 2011. The hospitals included those that were located in coastal areas hit hard by the tsunami and were expected to play central roles in the provision of medical services at the time of disasters.

In the survey, doctors, such as specialists on lifesaving and emergency medical procedures, looked into clinical records of those patients and interviewed the doctors who were in charge of them.

Of the 138 patients whose deaths were deemed preventable, 55 had been hospitalized since before the disaster.

The survey said that due to the concentration of patients in serious conditions in the hospitals that were expected to play central roles, their medical staff members were unable to offer sufficient services to them. This situation was cited as one of the main contributors to their deaths.

The lack of medical products cited by the survey as another cause included infusion solution and medicines.

The survey also said that some of the patients who died had suffered deterioration of their conditions while they were staying in their homes or evacuation centers. If they had gotten to the hospitals earlier, they could have been saved, it said.

At the time of the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake that struck the areas in and around Kobe, many people were crushed under collapsed buildings. Learning a lesson from the experience, the government launched disaster medical assistance teams (DMAT) whose members are dispatched to the scenes of disasters to save people immediately after they occur.

In the Great East Japan Earthquake, due to the tsunami, many of the victims were already dead when DMAT members arrived at the scenes of the disaster.

On the other hand, the number of people who needed medical services began to increase several days after the disaster struck due to the deterioration of the environment at evacuation centers, among other reasons.

“Preparations to prevent the deterioration of chronic diseases are required in addition to measures to treat external injuries caused by disasters,” said Yuichi Koido, a senior official of the National Hospital Organization Disaster Medical Center.

The research team that conducted the latest survey proposed that hospitals stipulate in advance the procedures to transport patients to hospitals outside the disaster areas.

It also advised that hospitals should conclude agreements with medicine wholesalers and other companies on preferential supply of medicines and medical equipment at the time of disasters.

(Still) depending on TEPCO: Fukushima' dilemma

February 26, 2016

Fukushima towns grudgingly realize survival again depends on TEPCO

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201602260069>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Futaba Mayor Shiro Izawa was taken aback when the president of Tokyo Electric Power Co. paid a visit in early January.

Izawa has been working out of a temporary government office in the town of Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, since the disaster at TEPCO's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant forced all residents to evacuate Futaba in 2011.

"Have you perhaps forgotten that TEPCO is the perpetrator that has driven Futaba into the situation it finds itself?" Izawa grumbled at TEPCO President Naomi Hirose. "I am beyond furious."

But within minutes, Izawa was peppering Hirose with requests to rebuild life in his community.

Residents and government leaders around the still stricken nuclear plant continue to vilify the plant's operator, but they are increasingly aware that economic survival depends largely on the very entity that turned their communities upside down.

Before the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami caused the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, the host and surrounding communities depended largely on nuclear power plants for government subsidies and employment.

They are resigned to having again depend on TEPCO for the billions of yen that will be sunk into the prefecture for work to decommission the reactors at the utility's No. 1 plant as well as its No. 2 plant in Fukushima Prefecture.

Every day, about 7,000 workers pass through the gates of the Fukushima No. 1 plant for the decommissioning process that is expected to take decades to complete.

Some say the nuclear plant has been a source of income than crosses generations.

A 61-year-old man who was part of the team that constructed the No. 6 reactor at the plant now dismantles tanks that once contained radiation-contaminated water there.

"The nuclear plant remains unchanged as a stable workplace from before the accident," he said.

His father was also involved in construction of the nuclear plant, which started operating in 1971.

After the 2011 disaster, relatives beseeched the man to cut all ties with the plant. But he has no intention of ending his work there.

The effects of the accident indeed sparked anger and distrust of TEPCO and nuclear power in general.

The Fukushima prefectural government decided to end its dependence on nuclear plants and supply all electricity through renewable energy sources. It has asked for the decommissioning of all reactors in the prefecture.

However, the prefectural government faces the difficult task of revitalizing the local economy because about 70,000 residents remain in evacuation close to five years after the accident.

Decommissioning work is now one of the only realistic large-scale options to support the local economy.

The central and prefectural governments are placing high hopes on research and development related to decommissioning the reactors.

In September 2015, after the evacuation order was lifted for the town of Naraha, the Japan Atomic Energy Agency built a facility in the municipality to conduct experiments on remote-control use of robots in the decommissioning work.

An international joint research center is planned for Tomioka, which lies immediately north of Naraha.

“Community development will not proceed unless there is a core structure,” a government source said. “It would be perfectly all right if money was injected through the decommissioning business.”

TEPCO has been constructing bases for decommissioning work in municipalities where evacuation orders are still in place.

In Okuma, a community that co-hosts the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, TEPCO has built a facility to prepare 2,000 meals a day for workers at the plant. There are also plans to construct dormitories that can house 750 employees.

By the end of March, TEPCO’s Fukushima Revitalization Headquarters, now based at the J-Village training center about 20 kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 plant, will move to Tomioka.

“It is the responsibility of the central and other governments as well as TEPCO to create a situation where those who want to return can do so,” said Yoshiyuki Ishizaki, chief of the headquarters.

Kazuyuki Shima, 37, who has lived in temporary housing in Iwaki since evacuating from Okuma, believes that creating jobs will lead to a revitalized local community.

He now works at the TEPCO facility that prepares meals for workers.

“If people gather for decommissioning, the restart of supermarkets and hospitals will also be accelerated,” Shima said. “That will make it easier for local residents to return. If that happens, I believe this community will not be forgotten.”

At the same time, the decommissioning plans have led to unusual demographics.

Often, the number of workers involved in decommissioning exceeds the number of residents who have returned to their homes.

That is the case in Hirono, a town within a 30-kilometer radius of the Fukushima No. 1 plant. The town also has nearly twice as many men as women.

To prevent housing facilities from sprouting up all over the town, the local government plans to adopt an ordinance requiring prior notification of construction plans of such buildings.

About 1,300 workers involved in decommissioning and decontamination work around the plant now reside in Naraha, about triple the number of residents who have returned home.

The Naraha town government is encouraging the construction of housing for the workers at a golf course away from the residential area.

“Residents might be concerned about the large number of strangers in their community and will be hesitant about returning home,” a high-ranking town official said.

In Mayor Izawa’s deserted town of Futaba, there are no signs of when residents can return home.

After lambasting the TEPCO president, Izawa asked for help in persuading companies involved in decommissioning R&D to build offices in Futaba.

“I do feel the contradiction, and I am in quite a dilemma,” Izawa said. “But without that, can a local government that never had any other major industry ever think of surviving?”

(This article was written by Chikako Kawahara, Akifumi Nagahashi and Takuro Negishi.)

Preserving blackboard messages

February 26, 2016

Fukushima town to keep blackboards' messages

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160227_04/

A town in Fukushima Prefecture is planning to preserve blackboards with messages of encouragement written by rescue workers in the wake of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

All residents of Namie continue their evacuation from the town since the nuclear accident occurred at the nearby Fukushima Daiichi power plant 5 years ago.

Police and Self-Defense Force members conducted search and rescue operations soon after the disaster. They left words of encouragement for the town's residents on blackboards and whiteboards at Ukedo Elementary School.

Some wrote that they will come and help until the town recovers from the disaster. Others wrote, "Hang on, Ukedo."

Residents also responded to the encouragement. Some wrote that they are sure to return.

On Friday, town officials removed 12 boards from the school to keep them temporarily at another school. They will study how to preserve the boards for the long term, and how to show them to the public.

Vice Mayor Katsumi Miyaguchi said he was moved when he saw the messages. He added that the town wants to devise ways to keep the boards, and will listen to input from residents.

Disaster tourism: Voyeurism or education?

February 27, 2016

Does Tohoku's disaster tourism exploit or educate?

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2016/02/27/commentary/tohokus-disaster-tourism-exploit-educate/#.VtLNz-aDmov>

by Jeff Kingston

Special To The Japan Times

Disaster tourism can be an unsettling descent into voyeurism as visitors ghoulishly gawk at, and photograph, those caught up in catastrophe as if they're at a petting zoo. The concept has prompted widespread condemnation of insensitive tourists and travel companies exploiting disasters as marketing opportunities.

In the years following the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011, opponents of disaster tourism have claimed that its economic benefits are overstated while the ethical shortcomings are legion. Advocates counter that the economic benefits can be significant, crucial to regional recovery, and that there are important lessons to be learned.

There is no longer much to gawk at along the Tohoku region's tsunami-ravaged coast, however, save for some shattered buildings preserved to memorialize the tragedy. Bus companies and hotel operators pocket profits, but they also generate jobs and expose outsiders to a region that has always been a neglected backwater.

Recently I witnessed large buses from one local tour company disgorging dozens of sightseers for snapshots of the skeletal disaster management center and the derelict Takano Kaikan hall in Minamisanriku, Miyagi Prefecture. These tourists are spending money in local shops and restaurants in a remote place that has poor transport links and is in the middle of a noisy, messy all-encompassing rebuilding phase. What used to be the center of town is now a vast construction site dominated by giant berms of earth that will raise the town by about five meters.

I met a young man from Osaka who came as a volunteer and then decided to remain in the area. He pointed out that for devastated local businesses, disaster tourism is a welcome lifeline. Elsewhere, a big-screen TV in a hotel lobby features a 3-D video of the tsunami that allows guests to don special glasses and watch the unfolding tragedy. I suppose this could be educational, but the prevailing holiday atmosphere dissuaded me.

Denunciation of disaster tourism in Tohoku is grounded in sympathy for the victims and concerns that devastation is an unseemly attraction, but Australia National University's Simon Avenell, author of "Transnational Japan in the Global Environmental Movement," says he is not a purist in this regard.

"From a financial perspective, I'm generally supportive of disaster tourism, certainly because it brings people and some money into the region, but also because it offers local people a chance to express their feelings directly (rather than mediated through the press or TV)," he says. "As time goes by, 3/11 becomes less and less of a news item, so tourism can be at least a small communication pipeline for locals." However, Avenell also has qualms about the potential for masking serious unresolved issues, because by **promoting a sense of normalization "it could actually hamper fundamental change (and) ... its political benefits might be limited or even deleterious in the long run."**

The infamous Kyushu port of Minamata, which put mercury poisoning on the global radar in the 1970s, is now perhaps the most visited sight for school excursions by Kyushu students after Nagasaki's atomic bomb park and museum. Chris McMorran, a senior lecturer in Japanese studies at the National University of Singapore, takes his students there. He says tourism officials from Tohoku visited Minamata to learn about the city's educational disaster tourism initiatives and the role of *kataribe* (storytellers) in them. "Using an itinerary to create an opening for reflection and communication has long fit the learning objectives of overseas field learning experiences," he says. There are "packages that continue to attract visitors to Tohoku who want to hear from survivors, witness the destruction and (most intriguingly to me) view (and photograph) disaster monuments. In some areas, there are also new shopping areas

targeted at tourists, which feature locally handmade products and restaurants. It seems like these places are actively promoted by locals trying to start businesses in the absence of other major economic activity.” McMorran posits there are phases in Tohoku’s disaster tourism.

“First, through volunteerism, then volunteer tourism (or ‘voluntourism’), then disaster (recovery/support) tourism. It’s a fascinating evolution that has effectively controlled the potential anarchy of large-scale volunteerism and steered it into consumption (via tourism and the purchase of local goods) as the preferred disaster recovery response from citizens.”

The media has played a significant role in this latter phase. Philip Seaton, a professor of modern Japanese studies at Hokkaido University, has studied the role “**contents tourism**” has played in Tohoku’s recovery. This is where television shows, films and anime promote an area specifically by featuring it.

Producers chose sites “in disaster zones in the hope that the ‘contents tourism’ induced by popular culture would help in the more general economic revitalization efforts of disaster areas,” Seaton says. Prime examples include NHK dramas “Yae no Sakura,” set in Aizuwakamatsu, Fukushima Prefecture, and “Amachan,” set in Kuji, Iwate Prefecture. It is estimated that the latter generated ¥30 billion in economic benefits for Tohoku as fans of the series flocked to the gorgeous coastal location to sample local delicacies from the show.

It is also clear that a variety of organizations, ranging from religious and education institutions to NPOs and activist groups, are conducting study tours in the region that are explicitly educational. As I wrote two weeks ago, the ruins of Okawa Elementary School in Miyagi Prefecture are now a site for school tours that aim to improve disaster preparation. Universities are also running study tours in the region.

Hiroko Aihara, a journalist with Japan Perspective News, notes that the Japan NGO Center for International Cooperation has issued guidelines for responsible disaster tourism but remains ambivalent over “dark tourism,” which involves places associated with death and suffering. **She is concerned about a lingering radiation risk in Fukushima and worries that if tours don’t involve local residents and the evacuees, visitors might get a skewed impression that downplays the nuclear disaster — which could be “converted to political propaganda by the ‘nuclear village,’”** she says, referring to pro-nuclear interests. She also cautions that schools and teachers should disclose information about the dangers of radiation exposure near the stricken nuclear plant and suggests bringing individual measurement devices. If properly led, she agrees that educational tours can be beneficial, but she is not in favor of mere casual observation.

Fukushima Prefecture is sponsoring trips to Namie, an abandoned town just 9 kilometers away from Tepco’s three nuclear meltdowns, that convey a powerful message to visitors about the hubris of nuclear safety — underscored by the continuing ban on overnight stays. Nearby Futaba, however, has taken down the iconic pro-nuclear energy welcome sign that spanned the entryway into that ghost town because it had become a favored photo op for tourists. Some disgruntled locals feel it should have been preserved for posterity to help future generations learn the lessons of Fukushima, but abashed town officials claim the aging sign had become a safety hazard. At least that’s their story, and they’re sticking to it. Jeff Kingston is the director of Asian Studies, Temple University Japan.

23% drop in fishing cooperatives since 2011

March 2, 2016

Disaster-hit prefectures see 23% fall in fishing industry workers

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/02/national/disaster-hit-prefectures-see-23-fall-in-fishing-industry-workers/#.VtdM5uaDILN>

Kyodo

SENDAI – The three northeastern prefectures hit hardest by the 2011 tsunami and nuclear disasters saw a 23 percent fall in the membership of fishery cooperatives since the catastrophe, a Kyodo News survey showed Wednesday.

The decline in the number of workers was most pronounced in Miyagi Prefecture, with full-fledged cooperative members sliding to about two-thirds the level before the devastating earthquake and tsunami disasters, which also triggered the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

The survey, covering Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures, showed many in the industry have likely let their cooperative membership lapse because they felt it impossible to rebuild their businesses after losing their boats or facilities, or they may have decided to retire due to their advanced age or lack of successors, according to officials of local cooperatives.

Some people have also failed to meet the conditions of full-fledged membership because they had to evacuate the area and cannot work the seas as regularly as they had done before.

Members of fishery cooperative associations, which engage in processing or sales of marine products, are mainly fishermen or small seafood company operators. Full membership is given to people who live primarily by fishing.

According to the survey, the number of full cooperative association members in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures dropped to about 13,600 in 2015 from about 17,800 in 2010.

By prefecture, the rate of decrease in Iwate stood at about 18 percent over the past five years, while that in Fukushima, where areas around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant are still subject to evacuation orders, stood at about 11 percent.

Fishing in Fukushima has largely ceased due to the nuclear crisis that contaminated the marine environment, with fishermen currently limiting their catch to a certain type of fish in what are deemed “trial operations.”

But the decline in the number of cooperative members in Fukushima has been less sharp than the other two prefectures because membership gives those affected the resources to help their applications for compensation, according to people familiar with the matter.

If financial support is rolled back, the number of cooperative members could sink further, an official of the Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Fisheries Co-operative Associations said.

Decrepit or historic?

March 3, 2016

Creator slams removal of pro-nuclear signs from Fukushima ghost town

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/03/national/fukushima-ghost-towns-removal-pro-nuclear-signs-irks-designer/#.VthmU-aDILN>

by Miya Tanaka

Kyodo

KOGA, IBARAKI PREF. – A few months before the fifth anniversary of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear crisis, a town near the plant began removing two signs that unintentionally became ironic reminders of how Japan once blindly worshipped atomic power.

A slogan above a street in Futaba town center since 1988 read “Nuclear power: the energy for a bright future.” The town is now radioactive and empty, with all of its residents evacuated.

The signs are historic, but the municipality does not like them. It called them “decrepit” and decided to dismantle them because parts might fall.

Evacuee and father-of-two Yuji Onuma regrets this. He wrote one of the slogans: It was a school homework task, and his entry won a competition. He warns the move could be perceived as an attempt to “cover up” a shameful past.

“The signs should have been kept at the original places to continue reminding people, especially the younger generation, about what the town has gone through. . . . If things are removed just because it does not suit reality, we could repeat the same mistakes,” said the 39-year-old Onuma. He was speaking in Koga, Ibaraki Prefecture, where he has lived since May 2014.

Onuma wrote the slogan in 1987 as part of his sixth-grade school homework. To his surprise, it won an award in a contest and was used for one of the two pro-nuclear banners set up in the town.

The contest was held to encourage local support for nuclear power, the town said. Futaba was already a co-host of the six-reactor Fukushima No. 1 plant by that time, and there had been calls inside the town to bring in more units — along with the hefty subsidies offered for doing so.

Onuma said even as a child he was aware of the risks of nuclear accidents. The 1986 Chernobyl catastrophe was still a fresh memory and that European ordeal fueled fears of radiation in Japan.

But at the same time he had relatives working at the Fukushima No. 1 complex and knew that local inns and shopping areas were flourishing as clients such as staffers of plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. came and went. “There was an atmosphere of not speaking critically of nuclear power when someone next to you could be in a related job. It was a small town, with a population of about 8,000,” Onuma said.

At one point he left Futaba, but returned in 2005 at the age of 29. While working for a real-estate company, he built two apartments — one just next to the signboard bearing his slogan — and rented them mainly to Tepco employees to earn additional income.

The 16-meter-long sign was a source of pride. He recalls showing it to his wife, Serina, 40, and her parents when they toured the town on the day of their engagement ceremony in 2010.

“I told them about the sign, which showed how people in the town lived side by side with the nuclear plant,” he said. He also told them he believed his financial future was secure with Tepco and his apartment rentals business.

But his life plan was ruined by one of the world’s worst nuclear crises, triggered by the huge earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011. He and his wife, who was seven months pregnant at the time, fled their home. It was about 4 km from the complex.

Even in the midst of the confusion, Onuma was reminded repeatedly of the sign because television and other media used it as a symbol of the town.

He felt embarrassed: "The accident changed my way of thinking completely," Onuma said, adding he thought that, in the end, nuclear power had brought a "doomed" future rather than a "bright" one.

Regretting his earlier support for atomic power and in a gesture toward pulling the plug on it, Onuma began using solar power at his home in Ibaraki. He even turned it into a business by purchasing cheap land and installing over 1,000 solar panels with the help of a loan.

Onuma has also taken on the de facto role of guardian of Futaba's nuclear promotion signs after he noticed last March that they were on the verge of being dumped by the town. The municipality earmarked ¥4.1 million in the fiscal 2015 budget for their removal.

Onuma organized a petition, collecting 6,502 signatures calling for this negative legacy to be preserved in the town. In response, Futaba Mayor Shiro Izawa maintained that the signs would be taken down but promised to "carefully preserve" them and "put them on display" again when the town recovers from the crisis.

A town official said a planned disaster memorial park may be one possible location, although nothing has been decided yet.

Seeing his slogan being removed from the sign in December, Onuma was disappointed that long-familiar scenery was changing before his eyes.

While the radiation cleanup is making progress in some parts of the town, Onuma admitted there is still no clear prospect of returning.

"Buildings don't seem to have changed much in appearance, but I'm not sure whether people can live there without worries even after the decontamination is finished," he said.

10,000 children still living outside Fukushima Pref.

March 3, 2016

10,000 Fukushima children still live outside prefecture after disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160303/p2g/00m/0dm/075000c>

March 3, 2016 (Mainichi Japan)

FUKUSHIMA, Japan (Kyodo) -- Some 10,000 children whose families fled Fukushima Prefecture because of the March 2011 nuclear disaster have yet to return, prefectural government officials said Thursday.

Five years after the earthquake and ensuing tsunami triggered the radiation crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear complex, families with children continue to have serious reservations about environmental safety, according to a recent survey by the prefectural government.

As of last October, the number of such minors who have evacuated to areas outside the prefecture stood at 10,557. Among them, 4,760 were from 12 coastal municipalities designated as evacuation zones in the nuclear crisis, the survey said. The prefecture has 59 municipalities.

With young people absent from those areas, reconstruction may be difficult in the future, experts say.

"We need to implement more measures to improve the child-rearing environment (for their parents) to enable those children to return home" because the children are with their families, a prefectural government official of the children and youth division said.

The prefectural government has allocated subsidies to make medical costs free for children under 18 since October 2012. Since last year, the local government subsidizes moving expenses for those evacuees who want to return to their hometowns.

Some families are estimated to have transferred their resident registration to the municipalities to which they have fled, most likely making the actual number of evacuee minors from Fukushima higher, prefectural government officials said.

There were about 18,000 child evacuees as of April 2012. The number gradually declined after evacuation orders for some municipalities were lifted because radiation doses have dropped due to decontamination works. As of Feb. 1, the prefecture's population stood at around 1.91 million.

See also:

10,000 Fukushima children still live outside prefecture after disaster, survey shows

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/03/national/10000-fukushima-children-still-live-outside-prefecture-disaster-survey-shows/#.Vthm5OaDILN>

Kyodo

FUKUSHIMA – Some 10,000 children whose families fled Fukushima Prefecture due to the March 2011 nuclear disaster have yet to return, prefectural government officials said Thursday.[...]

Do not abandon nuclear victims

March 3, 2016

FIVE YEARS AFTER: 'Don't abandon us,' victims of Fukushima nuclear accident say

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201603030058>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Miyako Kumamoto longs for the days of sharing fresh home-grown produce with her friends in the clean mountain air of Fukushima Prefecture.

But now, the 73-year-old fears she will be forced to live alone on the streets of Tokyo under government policies concerning evacuees from the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

"It is wrong for the central government to say 'return home' and to lift evacuation orders even though its own declaration of an emergency situation for the nuclear accident remains in place,"

Kumamoto told a protest rally of about 780 people at Tokyo's Hibiya Park on March 2.

Saying the government is ignoring their opinions and safety concerns about radiation levels, the protesters slammed Tokyo's push for evacuees to return to their homes near the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. They later marched near government offices and in front of the headquarters of Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the nuclear plant.

The rally was hosted by a national organization called Hidanren, which comprises plaintiffs in lawsuits against the central government and TEPCO, and joined by Fukushima residents who are still living in evacuation nearly five years after the nuclear disaster started in March 2011.

Before the rally, Hidanren gave a government official a letter addressed to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The letter demanded a retraction of policies that “abandon the nuclear victims.”

The central government plans to lift evacuation orders around the Fukushima nuclear plant by the end of March 2017, except for “difficult-to-return” zones where annual radiation doses still exceed 50 millisieverts.

Fukushima residents who were not living in evacuation zones but still fled after the nuclear disaster unfolded have been provided free housing by the Fukushima prefectural government. The prefecture has decided to terminate that program for the “voluntary” evacuees in April 2017.

Kenichi Hasegawa, a 62-year-old co-representative of Hidanren, told the demonstrators that government officials showed no intention of changing the policies.

“I felt outrage,” Hasegawa said. “Let’s raise our voices and stand up against them together.”

According to the Fukushima prefectural government, around 165,000 people evacuated their homes due to the nuclear disaster as of May 2012. As of January 2016, 100,000 remained living in evacuation, including around 5,700 in Tokyo.

Kumamoto, whose husband died in 2007, has been living in public housing in Tokyo’s Katsushika Ward since April 2011.

She had moved from Sagami-hara, Kanagawa Prefecture, to Tamura, Fukushima Prefecture, in 2003. For years in Tamura, she and her husband grew fruits and vegetables in a field. She said cooking and eating the food with her friends was more important than anything else.

The area where she lived in Tamura, between 20 and 30 kilometers from the nuclear plant, was designated an emergency evacuation preparation zone after the meltdowns. The designation was lifted in September 2011, and city workers have since decontaminated the area.

But Kumamoto said the radiation has not been lowered to a level that reassures her that she can safely return home.

The Tokyo metropolitan government has asked Kumamoto to reapply for public housing if she wants to continue living there after April 2017.

“If I am not picked in the lottery, I would have to wander around in the streets,” Kumamoto said.

Yukiko Kameya, 71, has lived with her husband in Tokyo’s Minato Ward since fleeing from Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture, after the disaster.

Most areas in Futaba are still designated as “difficult-to-return zones,” with annual radiation doses exceeding 50 millisieverts.

Futaba is also a candidate site for interim storage of soil and debris contaminated with radioactive substances from the nuclear accident.

“Since we cannot return there, I want a place to live to be guaranteed,” Kameya said. “I want the land to be returned to the state before the accident.”

After the rally at Hibiya Park, Kameya led a march in front of a ministry office building and TEPCO’s headquarters.

She shouted, “Return my hometown.”

Aki Hashimoto, 60, who traveled from Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture, to attend the rally, said a friend in Tokyo once asked, “Are you still making a fuss over the issue?”

Hashimoto said the frustration and disappointment over that comment have not eased.

“I do not want the nuclear accident to be forgotten,” Hashimoto said.

(This article was written by Miki Aoki, Mana Nagano, and Jun Sato.)

Moms of Iitate



Current crop: Eiko Kanno (left) and Yoshiko Kanno, evacuees from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster, show off harvested green onions near a temporary housing complex in Date, Fukushima Prefecture. The two women are featured in the film 'Moms of Iitate — Together with Soil,' which is directed by Mizue Furui. | COURTESY OF MIZUE FURUI/KYODO

March 4, 2016

Film depicts life of evacuees from Fukushima

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2016/03/04/films/film-depicts-life-of-evacuees-from-fukushima/#.VtnOJeaDmot>

by Keiji Hirano

Kyodo

Freelance journalist Mizue Furui is a frequent visitor to a small housing complex in northeastern Japan for evacuees from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster.

While domestic issues are not her field, she found herself drawn to Fukushima by parallels she saw between the fate of Fukushima evacuees and Palestinians.

“Both of them have been driven from their homes,” says Furui, who has covered Palestinian issues, particularly concerning women and children, for almost 30 years.

“I wanted to report how the evacuees have lived and what they think, given the unjust hardships,” she says. Next week marks the fifth anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake, which was followed by a massive tsunami that triggered a nuclear crisis centered in the Tohoku region.

Furui's effort evolved into a documentary film titled "Moms of Iitate — Together with the Soil," focusing on two female evacuees in their late 70s from the village of Iitate, adjacent to the Fukushima No. 1 complex.

All residents of Iitate in Fukushima Prefecture were required to evacuate following the nuclear meltdown, which became the world's worst since Chernobyl, with the two women — Eiko Kanno and Yoshiko Kanno — eventually settling in temporary housing in the city of Date, also in Fukushima Prefecture.

Eiko and Yoshiko, who have both lost their husbands, although not to the disaster, were neighbors and close friends in Iitate. Their children and grandchildren have also taken shelter in other cities.

Furui, who started visiting Fukushima shortly after the triple disasters occurred, first met the two women in 2013 while they were involved in a program to teach people outside the prefecture how to make traditional Iitate foods such as miso and rice cakes.

Believing that people might not be able to resume life in Iitate for decades, the two women hoped their town's food culture could nevertheless be preserved. They still also till the soil to maintain their old way of life.

Furui eventually began shooting footage of their food-preservation efforts and their refugee life as farmers.

"When the time came to make miso, we did so, and when the time came to harvest rice, we did so. ... It was quite natural for us to secure our own food by ourselves," Eiko says in the film. "I can be free from the fear of radiation and feel, even for just a moment, as if I am staying in my own village by touching the soil."

Furui says Eiko reminds her of Ghada Ageel, a Palestinian woman who collected and recorded narratives and songs performed by elderly Palestinians about their lives and struggles under the Israeli occupation to hand down to later generations.

Furui's first film, "Ghada — Songs of Palestine," depicts the Palestinians' lives through the eyes of the woman.

In her latest film, Furui says she wants to present people whose lives have been changed by the nuclear accident through the eyes of Eiko and Yoshiko.

"I had wanted to end my days looking out at the mountains around the village," Eiko says. "The village and its people lived together with nature's bounty."

Furui first visited the Gaza Strip and West Bank with her camera as a rookie journalist at the age of 40. Since quitting her job as an office worker, she has also covered Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Uganda.

Her photos, videos and articles have been carried by major magazines and TV news shows.

She now hopes to continue following the evacuees from Iitate until they return home, if it is possible during their lifetime.

"Iitate was beautiful, with cherry blossoms blooming and birds singing, when I visited there in May 2011," Furui says. "It is sad that such a village was damaged."

"Moms of Iitate," whose production costs were covered by around 300 mostly individual donors, will be screened at a Tokyo movie theater in May, followed by screenings in other cities in Japan.

Furui says she plans to create an English version of the film so it can be screened at international film festivals and other overseas venues.

Fukushima farmland recovery well behind

March 2, 2016

Farmland recovery in Fukushima Pref. lags behind other tsunami-hit areas

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160302/p2a/00m/0na/001000c>

Just 33 percent of Fukushima Prefecture farmland hit by the tsunami following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake has been restored, compared to an average of 74 percent for all tsunami-hit areas, according to government figures released on March 1.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries has been releasing data on the recovery of disaster area farmland every year in March. The area of farmland hit by tsunami ranges over 21,480 hectares in Aomori, Iwate, Miyagi, Fukushima, Ibaraki and Chiba prefectures. Of this, 15,920 hectares have finished having debris and salt from the tsunami removed and are once again farmable.

Some 2,120 hectares of the unrestored farmland in Fukushima Prefecture lies within the evacuation zone around the disaster-stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. However, the 33 percent restoration rate remains low compared to other tsunami-hit regions including Miyagi and Iwate prefectures, where 88 and 67 percent of tsunami-damaged farmland can be planted again, respectively.

Meanwhile, merging of farmland into plots larger than 1 hectare is gradually proceeding, with 49 percent of the 8,990 hectares in Miyagi, Fukushima and Iwate prefectures planned for this already consolidated. At 319 tsunami-hit fishing ports in the six prefectures including Hokkaido, dock construction and other work has proceeded, with 97 percent now fully or partly capable of accepting catches. Although the ministry estimates that the remaining fishing ports will also be usable by the end of March, only 73 percent of them have been restored to full functionality.

Agriculture minister Hiroshi Moriyama told a post-Cabinet meeting news conference, "We now have an outlook for infrastructure recovery (in tsunami-hit areas). In Fukushima, we still need measures to fight against damaging unfounded rumors." The next challenges appear likely to be luring farmers to work the land and finding new buyers for the agricultural products from it.

Fukushima has not recovered



A temporary depot for radioactive waste is seen in Naraha, Fukushima Prefecture, in January. Many residents remain in evacuation following the nuclear disaster. (Yosuke Fukudome)

March 4, 2016

FIVE YEARS AFTER: Recovery not in sight for 62% in Fukushima

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201603040061>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Although optimism is rising, 62 percent of Fukushima residents still feel that the end is nowhere in sight for rebuilding the prefecture from damage caused by the triple disaster in 2011, a survey showed. In comparison, 36 percent said the roadmap for reconstruction is becoming clearer, according to the telephone survey conducted jointly by The Asahi Shimbun and Fukushima Broadcasting Co. on Feb. 27 and 28.

On March 11, 2011, the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami slammed the coast of the Tohoku region and set off the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The survey, which received 1,015 valid responses, asked Fukushima residents whether they saw positive signs on the path to recovery ahead of the fifth anniversary of the disaster.

Fifty-three percent of the respondents said “not very much,” down 1 percentage point from a survey in 2012, while 9 percent said “not at all,” compared with 38 percent in 2012.

Thirty-five percent said a reconstruction roadmap is in place “to a certain extent,” up sharply from 7 percent in 2012, and 1 percent selected “very much,” the survey showed.

The annual survey is the sixth in a series that started six months after the triple disaster.

Asked how long it would take for the life in the prefecture to return to pre-3/11 conditions, 51 percent, the highest figure, said “more than 20 years,” followed by 20 percent who said “around 10 years” and 18 percent who said “around 20 years.”

Asked about the recent resumption of nuclear reactor operations in Japan, 77 percent of the Fukushima residents said they “disapprove of” the reactor restarts, compared with 10 percent who “approve of” such moves.

In comparison, a nationwide survey conducted in February showed that 54 percent of Japanese disapprove of the reactor restarts while 31 percent approve.

Only 17 percent of Fukushima residents said they “approve of” the central government’s handling of the nuclear disaster, far below the 66 percent who “disapprove of” its efforts, the survey showed.

Similarly, 13 percent of the residents “approve of” the way the central government and Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the Fukushima plant, have dealt with contaminated water accumulating at the plant, while 74 percent had a negative appraisal of the work.

Fukushima Prefecture officials have been struggling to improve the image of the prefecture that has been tarnished by the nuclear disaster.

According to the survey, 68 percent of residents said the image of Fukushima Prefecture has “not recovered.” Specifically, 58 percent said “not really” and 10 percent said “not at all.”

Thirty percent said the image has “recovered,” comprising 1 percent who said “greatly” and 29 percent who said “to a certain extent.”

Gathering in Iwaki to remember Fukushima

March 5, 2016

FIVE YEARS AFTER: 3/11 evacuees and their supporters hold emotional ceremony in Tohoku

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201603050035>

March 05, 2016

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

IWAKI, Fukushima Prefecture--Hundreds of people who were forced to evacuate their homes after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster gathered on a beach here March 5 with supporters to remember the day that transformed their lives.

The event involving 800 or so people was held in the leadup to the fifth anniversary of the event on March 11.

Held under the banner of “We will not forget Fukushima! Gathering of prayer,” the participants began building a bonfire before dawn at the Yotsukura beach. At around 5:30 a.m., some of them performed a traditional local dance, called “Jangara.”

As the sun began to rise, they joined hands to form a horizontal line and offered a silent prayer toward the sea. Then, they sang the traditional Japanese folk song, “Furusato” (hometown), to pray for the repose of those who perished in the disaster and for the continuing reconstruction of their hometowns in devastated areas of northeastern Japan.

The event was organized by a private group.

Delays affect school rebuilding

March 4, 2016

FIVE YEARS AFTER: Students' school life still suffering post-3/11

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201603040032>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Reconstruction delays are affecting students at 121 public schools in the Tohoku region's three prefectures hardest hit by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, according to an Asahi Shimbun survey. Elementary, junior and senior high schools, as well as special schools for children with disabilities, make up the 121 affected schools where normalcy has yet to return.

They are all in 42 cities, towns and villages located mainly in the coastal areas of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures.

They accounted for 14 percent of a total of 851 public schools in the areas as of the end of January, according to the survey covering the three prefectures' education boards.

Of the 121 schools, 38 schools operated classes in temporary school buildings constructed mainly in the schoolyard since the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, destroyed or damaged their facilities.

In addition, 29 schools still operated on the campuses of other schools or at external private-sector facilities. Together, they accounted for 41 percent of a total of 165 schools in the 42 municipalities that were rendered unusable in the wake of the megaquake and ensuing nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Of those 67 schools, nine are scheduled to return to permanent facilities in fiscal 2016, which starts in April.

Schoolyards at 54 schools are still occupied, at least partially, by temporary housing complexes for people displaced by the triple disaster, meaning that students have to take physical education classes and extracurricular athletic activities in limited-space schoolyards or at locations outside their schools. Only three schools in Iwate Prefecture have seen temporary shelters completely relocated from their schoolyards in the past five years, indicating that delays in the construction of permanent homes for disaster victims have negatively impacted school activities in the region.

"As these schools can use only a limited space of their schoolyards, it is difficult to give students sufficient room for exercise, and we are concerned about the lack of physical activities and declined fitness among students," said a Miyagi Prefectural Board of Education official.

Education board officials in the three prefectures said that delays in their rebuilding efforts owe much to soaring material and personnel costs in the region, which has seen extensive reconstruction projects over the past five years.

Cases of unsuccessful bidding have been common in public school rebuilding projects, and such projects' original plans have been delayed by between six months and two years in Iwate Prefecture, for example. School officials said the delays in their rebuilding efforts have taken a heavy toll on students. At the municipal Watanoha Junior High School in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, for instance, students are forced to study in a classroom next to a judo training room in a temporary school building, often suffering a disturbance.

(This article was written by Sokichi Kuroda and Takahiro Sasaki.)

Less overweight

March 5, 2016

Fukushima children less overweight

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160305_03/

A Japanese government survey shows that the number of overweight children in Fukushima Prefecture has decreased to the level before the nuclear disaster in March 2011.

Japan's education ministry's annual survey covers children throughout the country from age 5 to 17.

The ratio of children weighing 20 percent more than the standard level had been increasing in Fukushima until last year. **Children there were said to have gained weight, as outdoor activities were restricted after the nuclear accident.**

But all such restrictions have been lifted and ministry officials are promoting campaigns for more physical exercise.

Meanwhile, elementary and junior high school students in Fukushima who are refusing to go to school increased 3 years in a row to 1,785 last year. That's about 200 more than before the disaster.

An education official of Fukushima Prefecture says some children have difficulties in adapting in a new environment after changing schools due to the evacuation.

Three photographers & Tohoku recovery

<http://features.japantimes.co.jp/march-11-photography/>

Documenting Tohoku's long road to recovery

Rob Gilhooly

Special to The Japan Times

We profile three photographers who have worked tirelessly since the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster to ensure the struggles of the region are not forgotten

"Dark tourism" in Fukushima

March 6, 2016

Dark tourism' grows at 3/11 sites

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/06/national/dark-tourism-grows-311-sites/>

by Shingo Ito

AFP-JIJI

Shinichi Niitsuma is enthusiastic about showing visitors the attractions of the small town of Namie: its tsunami-hit coastline, abandoned houses and hills overlooking the radiation-soaked reactors of the disabled Fukushima nuclear power plant.

Five years after the nuclear disaster emptied this stretch of Honshu's northeastern coastline, tourism is giving residents of the abandoned town a chance to exorcise the horrors of the past.

Like the Nazi concentration camps in Poland or Ground Zero in New York, the areas devastated by the Fukushima disaster have recently become hot spots for "dark tourism" and drawn more than 2,000 visitors keen to see the aftermath of the worst nuclear accident in a quarter century.

"There is no place like Fukushima — except maybe Chernobyl — to see how terrible a nuclear accident is," Niitsuma said, referring to the 1986 disaster in Ukraine.

"I want visitors to see this ghost town, which is not just a mere legacy but clear and present despair," he added as he drove visitors down Namie's main street just 8 km (5 miles) from the stricken nuclear plant. On March 11, 2011, a magnitude-9 earthquake off Tohoku's coast spawned massive tsunami that swept ashore, leaving an estimated 18,000 people dead or missing.

Namie's residents were evacuated after the tsunami tipped the nuclear power plant into meltdown, and no-one has yet been allowed to move back due to the radiation.

Niitsuma, 70, is one of 10 local volunteer guides who organize tours to sights in Namie and other communities in Fukushima, including the tightly regulated areas.

The volunteers take visitors through the shells of buildings left untouched as extremely high radiation discouraged demolition work. The guides use dosimeters to avoid any hot spots.

A tsunami-hit elementary school is another stop on the morbid tour.

The clocks in the classrooms stopped at 3:38 p.m., the exact moment the killer waves swept ashore.

In the gymnasium, a banner for the 2011 graduation ceremony still hangs over a stage and the crippled nuclear plant is visible through shattered windows.

Former high school teacher Akiko Onuki, who survived tsunami that claimed six of her students and a colleague, and is now one of the volunteer guides.

“We must ensure there are no more Fukushima’s,” Onuki, 61, said in explaining the reasons behind the tours of her devastated home.

Tourist Chika Kanezawa of Saitama Prefecture said she was shocked by the conditions.

“TV and newspapers report reconstruction is making progress and life is returning to normal,” Kanezawa, 42, said. “But in reality, nothing has changed here.”

Dairy farmer Masami Yoshizawa is still raising about 300 cows in Namie that are subsisting on radiation-contaminated grass in defiance of a government slaughter order.

As Yoshizawa showed off his herd, he explained that he’s keeping the cattle alive as a protest against Tokyo Electric Power Co., which manages the plant, and the government.

“I want to tell people all over the world, ‘What happened to me may happen to you tomorrow’,” Yoshizawa said.

The disaster shattered the government’s carefully cultivated nuclear safety myth and kept its dozens of commercial reactors offline for about two years amid nuclear safety radiation exposure fears.

But the government is gradually restarting them, claiming the resource-poor country needs nuclear power.

English teacher Tom Bridges, who also lives in Saitama, said he could share the victims’ anger and frustration through the tour.

“It’s not a happy trip but it’s a necessary trip,” he said.

Some residents still grieving their loved ones and their inability to return to their homes, say they have mixed feelings watching sightseers tramping through their former hometown.

But Philip Stone, executive director of the Institute for Dark Tourism Research at Britain’s University of Central Lancashire, said recently that such tangible reminders of disasters serve as “warnings from history.”

Niitsuma, who is from Soma, a coastal city some 35 km (just over 20 miles) north of the Fukushima No. 1 plant, says he feels haunted by regret for not having been active in the anti-nuclear movement, even though he opposed reactor construction.

“I should have acted a little more seriously,” he said.

“I’m working as a guide partially to atone.”

Labour shortage

February 29, 2016

Manpower shortages in disaster-hit areas curb subsidy applications

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160229/p2a/00m/0na/018000c>

At least one in four business operators in Iwate and Miyagi prefectures devastated by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami has decided to forgo applications for government subsidies for approved projects due to local manpower shortages, it has been learned.

- **【Related】** News Navigator: What's causing the 3/11 disaster reconstruction labor shortage?

The subsidy program is aimed at creating jobs in areas devastated by the quake and tsunami disaster and the ensuing Fukushima nuclear crisis by encouraging businesses to build new and additional factories and other facilities. Many local businesses, however, are finding it hard to secure enough workers from among local residents to meet the conditions to apply for the subsidies, according to the Iwate and Miyagi prefectural governments.

In those two prefectures, 25 percent or more of the 198 business operators whose project proposals were approved under the subsidy program later decided not to apply for the subsidies, as many of them failed to secure enough local workers, among other conditions.

According to the two prefectural governments, rising reconstruction demand in the wake of the 2011 quake disaster and other factors has resulted in a concentration of labor in a handful of industries and regions, hampering efforts to rehabilitate industries in some disaster-affected areas.

The subsidy program is one of the government's key measures for reviving industries in disaster-ravaged areas. Under the program, companies whose proposed projects pass screenings are eligible to apply for subsidies with the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry. Once the ministry decides to grant subsidies, the companies embark on their projects.

A total of 512 business operators based in Aomori, Iwate, Miyagi, Fukushima and Ibaraki prefectures have thus far had projects clear screenings for subsidies totaling 199.8 billion yen between May 2013 and September 2015, with the projects ranging from seafood processing to electronics parts production and distribution of goods.

However, in Iwate and Miyagi prefectures alone, at least 50 out of 198 business operators whose projects had cleared the screenings have decided not to apply for the subsidies, according to a survey by the Mainichi Shimbun. The industry ministry said it had decided by the end of January this year to grant subsidies to only 169 out of the 512 business operators in the aforementioned five prefectures. Many of the remaining companies have either decided not to apply for subsidies or apparently remain undecided about whether to apply. As the application deadline looms at the end of March, more and more companies are expected to give up on applying.

According to the Iwate and Miyagi prefectural governments, many companies have ended up forgoing subsidy applications because they have been unable to hire the specified number of local workers. Soaring material and labor costs in the wake of the triple disasters and changes in those companies' business conditions were also among the factors that drove them to give up on subsidy applications.

One seafood processing company in Kesennuma, Miyagi Prefecture, decided not to apply for subsidies even though the government had accepted its project proposal.

"We determined in the end that it would be impossible (to fill the condition) as there were no prospects for us to receive a large number of job applications," a company representative told the Mainichi. "While we would be able to hire foreign trainees, it is difficult to hire the required number of people as regular employees."

Concentration of manpower in the construction and other industries in line with disaster recovery work peaked in fiscal 2014, and workers have been expected to return to their original industry sectors, but the situation remains unchanged "because of prolonged public works projects," according to an official with the Miyagi Prefectural Government. "There will be more and more businesses that will likely bow out from subsidy applications," the official added.

Prior to the 2011 quake and tsunami disaster, the job-to-applicant ratio at job placement offices in Miyagi Prefecture stood at 0.53 in the prefectural capital of Sendai and 0.47 in the coastal city of Kesennuma in

December 2010, but the ratio gap widened after the catastrophe, standing at 1.34 and 2.15 in December 2015, respectively. The growing gap indicates that there is a remarkable manpower shortage along coastal areas.

The industry ministry originally planned to terminate the subsidy program at the end of this fiscal year, or in March 2016, but it has now decided to continue the program beyond next fiscal year as the subsidies have not been used up. The ministry ultimately aims to create 6,000 regular jobs under the subsidy program. However, it has not disclosed the amount of subsidies set to be granted or the job numbers created under the program to date, with a ministry official saying, "We are planning to take some time to achieve the goal."

Approximately 200 billion yen has been budgeted for the subsidy program. Companies applying for the subsidies are required to newly employ at least five local residents if their investment in new or additional construction projects is higher than 100 million yen while not exceeding 1 billion yen, for example.

Where are the students?

March 6, 2016

Japan areas hit hard by 2011 disaster threatened by loss of students

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160306/p2g/00m/0dm/005000c>

SENDAI (Kyodo) -- Areas of northeastern Japan hit hardest by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami now have fewer school-aged children, creating pressure to close or consolidate schools, school board data gathered by Kyodo News suggested Saturday.

The number of elementary and junior high school students in 42 of the hardest hit municipalities in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures now totals about 187,000, down 12.2 percent from five years earlier, according to data from local education boards.

That is more than twice the 5.2 percent drop nationwide as a result of the nation's declining birthrate. The greater decline in the areas of northeastern Japan most devastated by the 2011 disaster is due mainly to many families having moved away from coastal areas ravaged by the massive tsunami. The 42 municipalities also include areas where people were ordered to evacuate in the wake of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant disaster.

The decline in students has accelerated moves to eliminate and consolidate schools in those areas, casting a shadow over prospects for maintaining local communities, according to experts.

Bunkyo University professor Masaaki Hayo said schools can help cultivate a sense of unity. But he added, "Eliminating and consolidating schools could break up communities."

Katsuya Suzuki of the education board in Minamisoma, Fukushima, said, "It cannot be helped that people have settled where they have evacuated. As we also face lower birthrates, we need to think about new ways to operate schools."

Abe in Fukushima

March 5, 2016

Abe visits cattle ranch in Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160305_21/

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has promised government assistance to dairy farmers in Fukushima Prefecture.

Abe talked to cattle farmers on Saturday at a ranch in Fukushima City. His visit came ahead of the 5th anniversary of the March 11th earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster.

The ranch is jointly operated by 5 farmers who fled Iidate Village, Namie Town, and Minamisoma City after the nuclear meltdowns. Parts of the municipalities are still off-limits to residents, as they are within the nuclear evacuation zone.

Abe inspected a new cowshed that was built last September. He tasted yoghurt made from local milk.

The farmers told Abe they have a long way to go before their industry recovers. They said they are gradually overcoming unfounded rumors about radioactive contamination of their products.

Abe said success by the farmers will contribute to the future of the Tohoku region.

Difficult to make ends meet

March 5, 2016

People hit by 2011 disaster face money problems

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160305_26/

An NHK survey of living conditions in Japan's Fukushima Prefecture found nearly half of the respondents are having difficulty making ends meet.

NHK took the survey between December and February.

539 people affected by the 2011 disaster in Fukushima Prefecture responded. They included residents evacuated after the nuclear accident.

42 percent said their standard of living has not changed substantially, while 10 percent said it has improved. 37 percent said their situation has deteriorated, and 11 percent said they are struggling.

10 percent said their household income has increased. 30 percent said it is about the same. 37 percent said it has decreased, and 22 percent said they have no income.

On the subject of household spending, 63 percent said it has increased, 25 percent said it is the same, and 12 percent said it has fallen.

Asked about expenses that have increased since the disaster, 74 percent of respondents said transportation costs. 53 percent nominated food, and the same amount said utility bills. 49 percent cited expenses related to their homes.

Only 13% of Tohoku planned dikes completed

March 5, 2016

Tohoku dike projects way behind schedule

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/05/national/tohoku-dike-projects-way-behind-schedule/#.VtvZ--aDmot>

JJI

With the fifth anniversary of the March 11, 2011 earthquake and tsunami that devastated parts of Tohoku fast approaching, **of the projects launched to build and rebuild 400 kilometers of dikes in the hardest hit prefectures, only 12.9 percent of the barriers have been completed.**

All of the tsunami walls in 568 coastal areas in the prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima, were initially planned to be completed during the so-called intensive reconstruction period through fiscal 2015, which ends this month. The target has been met in only 73 of the areas.

Of the projects, construction is under way at 338 sites, or 59.5 percent of the total, but has yet to start in 157 locations, or 27.6 percent.

Many of the projects have been delayed due to prolonged talks and negotiations between local authorities and residents who have had trouble reaching agreements on the heights of the dikes and other issues such as labor and material shortages.

More than 18,000 people, mainly in coastal areas, died or went missing when the disaster struck.

Under the project, the new dikes and repairs are being designed to hold back “Level One” tsunami waves, which are believed to occur once every several decades to 100 years.

In September 2011, an expert panel from the government’s Central Disaster Prevention Council recommended the construction of barriers that can handle Level One tsunami waves while advising that preparations also be made to rapidly evacuate residents in the event of a Level Two tsunami, such as the one that struck in March 2011.

The tsunami barriers in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures will cover some 20 percent of their coastlines. Construction costs, estimated to total ¥1 trillion, will be financed mainly by state funds. By the end of December, 8.8 percent of the dike projects in Iwate were completed, with 85.1 percent still in the construction phase.

The rate of completed dikes as of the end of January came to 15.7 percent in Miyagi and 4.2 percent in Fukushima, while that of dikes under construction was 46.9 percent and 86.1, respectively.

The proportion of projects still in the preconstruction stage was particularly high in Miyagi, at 37.4 percent, where 382 of the three prefectures' 568 project sites are located.

In Miyagi, barriers are to be newly built, rather than rebuilt, at about 60 percent of the sites where prefecture-managed fishing ports are located.

In the city of Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, walls nearly 10 meters high were planned for one district, but the project stalled following request from residents to make them lower in a bid to preserve the scenic view.

In Kesennuma, another city in the prefecture, the local government is close to ordering that construction begin after three years of consultations with residents.

The Miyagi Prefectural Government has extended the target date for finishing all of the projects to the end of fiscal 2017, but it is still seen missing that goal as well by some.

Recovery will take longer than planned

March 6, 2016

FIVE YEARS AFTER: 45% of mayors in affected areas see delayed recovery

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201603060036>

By SATOSHI KIMURA/ Staff Writer

In a new survey, 19 of the 42 mayors in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures, or 45 percent, said that recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident will take longer than predicted three years ago.

The Asahi Shimbun survey also shows that the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant is continuing to hamper recovery efforts in Fukushima Prefecture, compared with the other two prefectures. As for 15 mayors in Fukushima Prefecture, nine, or 60 percent, said that their projected completion period of recovery will be in fiscal 2023 or later, according to the survey.

In contrast, almost all the mayors in Iwate and Miyagi prefectures said the recovery process will be completed by the end of fiscal 2022.

The survey is the fourth of its kind since The Asahi Shimbun started it in 2013. The 42 mayors were chosen as their municipalities were located in coastal areas damaged by the tsunami or ordered to evacuate due to the nuclear accident.

The Asahi Shimbun surveyed the mayors in writing and in interviews. As for the recovery completion period, they were asked to choose from "fiscal 2015," "fiscal 2016 to fiscal 2017," "fiscal 2018 to fiscal 2022" and "in fiscal 2023 or later."

Two of the 15 mayors in Fukushima Prefecture chose “fiscal 2015” in the survey held in 2013 but selected “in fiscal 2023 or later” in the latest survey. In addition to the two, five other mayors gave the same response in the latest survey although they had projected an earlier completion of the recovery process. The 15 mayors were also asked about factors obstructing the recovery. They were allowed to list up to three. Fourteen cited having to deal with the nuclear accident.

“It is realistic to think that recovery will take 20 or 30 years even if the evacuation order is lifted,” said Namie Mayor Tamotsu Baba. All the residents of Namie are currently living outside the town due to the evacuation order.

“The challenge is what we should do to maintain our town,” he added.

“Residents in my village cannot plan their future,” said Katsurao Mayor Masahide Matsumoto. All the residents in Katsurao have also evacuated the village.

“I want the central government to present its policies as early as possible on what to do with the (high radiation) ‘difficult-to-return’ zones,” Matsumoto added.

Of the 27 mayors in Iwate and Miyagi prefectures, 26 replied that the recovery will be completed by the end of fiscal 2022. The figure shows the seriousness of the delay of recovery efforts in Fukushima Prefecture.

As a factor that is obstructing their recovery, nine mayors in Miyagi Prefecture cited a “shortage of staff members for their municipal governments.” Meanwhile, in Iwate Prefecture, seven mayors cited a “shortage of businesses and workers,” but six chose a “shortage of staff members for their municipal governments.”

According to the internal affairs ministry, 39 municipalities of the three prefectures were demanding additional staff members as of January this year. The number of insufficient staff members stood at 196 in total.

Joban Line to be fully reopened by 2020

March 6, 2016

FIVE YEARS AFTER: Joban Line to be fully resumed by spring 2020

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201603060030>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Damaged in the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami and disrupted by the nuclear accident, the JR Joban Line, which runs between Tokyo and Miyagi Prefecture, is set to fully resume operation by spring 2020.

On March 5, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe inspected the Joban Line and told reporters, “I instructed the transport minister to set as early as possible the time when train services will be resumed along the entire portion.”

The government is expected to set the target of spring 2020 for the full resumption of service at its Reconstruction Promotion Council meeting on March 10, according to government sources. That will

allow railway services to be fully available before the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, to be held in the summer of that year.

At present, services are still unavailable in two sections. One is the 46-kilometer stretch between Tatsuta Station in Naraha, Fukushima Prefecture, and Haranomachi Station in Minami-Soma, also in the prefecture.

The other is the 22.6-km section between Soma Station in Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, and Hamayoshida Station in Watari, Miyagi Prefecture.

Of the 46-km stretch, the 21-km portion between Tomioka Station in Tomioka and Namie Station in Namie is close to the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, and most of the areas along the route have been designated as “difficult-to-return zones” due to high radiation levels.

In those areas, it is necessary to remove the crossties and gravel that are contaminated with radioactive substances and to lay new ones. The work is expected to continue until fiscal 2019.

Meanwhile, the operation of the remaining sections is scheduled to resume by fiscal 2017.

March 5, 2016

Government to spur work to fully reopen Fukushima’s disaster-hit JR Joban Line

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/05/national/government-to-spur-work-to-fully-reopen-fukushimas-disaster-hit-jr-joban-line/#.VtsEkOaDmot>

JJI

NARAHARA, FUKUSHIMA PREF. – Prime Minister Shinzo Abe expressed a willingness Saturday to spur work to fully reopen East Japan Railway Co.’s Joban Line in Fukushima Prefecture, which was partially closed following the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

The government is looking at completely reopening the Joban Line in the spring of 2020, ahead of the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, informed sources said.

“I’ve instructed the transport minister to promptly indicate the timing (of the reopening),” Abe told reporters during a visit to the Fukushima Prefecture town of Naraha near the disaster-crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The Joban Line’s operator, also known as JR East, has released a plan to reopen in stages by the end of 2017 all shuttered sections but the Tomioka-Namie segment near the nuclear plant.

The prime minister also said that he will instruct the industry minister to set up a public-private panel to start a detailed study this month on a plan to make Fukushima Prefecture a key region for renewable energy production.

“In Fukushima in 2020, hydrogen fuel for 10,000 fuel cell vehicles will be produced from (the use of) renewable energy,” Abe said.

On Saturday, he visited a stock farm in the city of Fukushima, a restaurant using local ingredients in the town of Hirono, a battery factory in Naraha and other facilities.

“The reconstruction of Tohoku is the Abe administration’s top priority,” the prime minister said ahead of the fifth anniversary on Friday of the massive disaster.

Tokohu is waiting...

March 5, 2016

Tohoku is literally still waiting to move on

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2016/03/05/how-tos/tohoku-literally-still-waiting-move/#.VtsELuaDmov>

by Philip Brasor and Masako Tsubuku

Earlier this month, the NHK travel series, “Tsurube Toasts Families,” in which *rakugo* (traditional comic storyteller) performer Shofukutei Tsurube and a guest visit a town and talk to residents on an impromptu basis, went to some new communities in the area destroyed by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011.

These neighborhoods consist of either makeshift housing or brand new residential developments occupied by people who had to move because their homes were destroyed in the disaster. Though it wasn’t the purpose of the show, many of the families Tsurube and that week’s guest, comedian Kanpei Hazama, spent time with are still unsettled five years after the disaster, since they haven’t decided where to rebuild or even if they will stay in the region.

According to government surveys, the population in the three prefectures — Fukushima, Iwate and Miyagi — affected by the disaster has decreased by 6.7 percent since that fateful day. That’s 92,000 people. Almost 19,000 either died in the disaster or remain missing. The rest have moved away. **The only municipality whose population has increased is the city of Sendai, and many of these newcomers are people who moved there to do the reconstruction work, so it doesn’t necessarily mean they are permanent residents.**

About 125,000 homes were completely destroyed on March 11, according to the Fire and Disaster Management Agency. In response, 31 local governments in the region made plans to help people rebuild their lost homes, but for various reasons the number of housing units initially anticipated went down over the past three years by 8,400, which represents 30 percent of the original number of homes that were going to be rebuilt.

According to the Asahi Shimbun, the main reason many families changed their minds is money. Because so much building is going on in the area, and many large construction companies are now starting work on projects for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, the cost of building materials and construction workers has skyrocketed. Before the quake, in certain parts of Miyagi Prefecture the average cost of building a house was ¥90,000 per *tsubo* (3.3 square meters). It is now almost ¥500,000 per *tsubo*. Though the central and local governments are providing housing subsidies to disaster victims, the amounts, which are limited, were calculated before prices started rising. More to the point, many of the targeted families are still paying off loans for the homes they lost. Earthquake insurance only pays out half of what a fire-insurance policy pays, so even the families who were insured didn’t receive enough money to rebuild completely. Some families have become impatient with the work being done to prepare land for new developments, like some who were featured on the NHK show. The longer they have to wait, the more likely it becomes that they won’t build on the land offered by the government. Instead, some have simply rebuilt their

homes on the land they already own, even if it's still in a dangerous location should another earthquake occur. Many have moved out of the area altogether.

Others still have no idea what to do. An 83-year-old man in Onagawa, Miyagi Prefecture, told the Asahi that he and his wife were living in temporary housing and had planned to build a new house on land he owned, but the local government was taking too long to elevate the property by 18 meters. In the meantime, costs kept going up and now he can no longer afford the house he had planned to build. Not only this, but his children, who have moved away, said they have no interest in taking over the house when he dies, so rebuilding seems to be a waste of money at his age. He's given up on the idea of rebuilding, but he has to get out of temporary housing next year.

A 56 years-old man told Asahi that he, his wife and his mother will have to leave their temporary housing by November, but the work being done to elevate his land near Ofunato Station won't be finished until 2018, so he's abandoned the idea of waiting, since he doesn't want to move to different temporary housing in the meantime. He also found out that none of his old neighbors were planning to rebuild, so if he did wait, his family would be the only one returning to the neighborhood.

Another problem is that **the compensation for the land offered by local governments is low**. The situation was very different in Kobe after the 1995 quake, because land prices in that city were always high. Though many of the Tohoku governments have offered to buy the old plots of land, it isn't easy because records regarding title to the land aren't always up-to-date. Municipalities are finding it difficult to locate all the stakeholders. Moreover, the disaster has wiped out or otherwise changed many property borders.

Families who plan to rebuild elsewhere need money for their move, and if a new plot of land is not being subsidized by the authorities and the family can't afford to buy it, they may opt to lease. Many municipalities are offering that option, which makes more sense for those victims whose advanced ages make it much harder for them to borrow money.

Age is also a factor in new public housing projects being built by local governments. The vacancy rate in public housing right now is about 7 percent, which isn't bad, but this will certainly rise, since only about 50 percent of the planned housing has been built so far. If the new tenants only live for another decade or so then the units will quickly become vacant; that is, unless more people move into the area. The National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, however, says the Tohoku area's population is falling faster than other areas in Japan. Maintaining vacant apartments in the future will become a huge burden on these governments.

Some local governments are trying to come up with new solutions. Yamada in Iwate Prefecture is offering disaster victims unified housing designs that bring down overall building costs. Sometimes the residents of a particular neighborhood, like the one featured in the NHK program, move as one body to newly developed land on higher ground, and since everybody orders their homes at the same time, the prices are lower.

But these are basically makeshift solutions to the larger problem of depopulation. **Like a tsunami, once the tide of people moving away from the disaster area is set in motion, it becomes almost impossible to stop it.** Philip Brasor and Masako Tsubuku blog about Japanese housing at www.catforehead.wordpress.com.

Not so "temporary" (housing)

March 7, 2016

FIVE YEARS AFTER: 10% of evacuees in temporary housing face uncertain future

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201603070047>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Roughly one in 10 of all households still living in free temporary housing due to the 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster has no idea where to live in the future, even though some must move out as early as this spring, an Asahi Shimbun survey shows.

As many occupants of temporary housing are struggling to rebuild their lives, the central government will have to consider steps to help them move into permanent dwellings.

Prefabricated structures were built to house victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident five years ago in the most affected prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima. The units in Iwate and Miyagi prefectures are expected to be dismantled by 2020.

Free temporary housing units for evacuees numbered around 54,000 in the three prefectures as of the end of January. This includes prefabricated structures built for victims, as well as regular rented accommodation.

The Disaster Relief Law stipulates that occupants can basically stay in temporary housing for up to two years.

But the time limit was extended to five years because of the scale of the disaster that struck northeastern Japan on March 11, 2011.

Prefectural authorities in Iwate and Miyagi decided in spring last year that evacuees in 12 municipalities are eligible to live in temporary housing for up to five years. This means that some of the evacuees will be obliged to move out of their temporary housing this spring.

In 14 localities in the two prefectures, evacuees are allowed to stay for a total of six years. This is because housing projects are lagging behind in those areas.

In the case of Fukushima Prefecture, no definite time limit is in place for residents forced from their homes in the evacuation zone established by the central government in the aftermath of the nuclear accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

But for those who fled of their own volition from areas outside the evacuation zone are permitted to remain in temporary housing in and out of Fukushima Prefecture for free, in principle, through March 2017.

The Asahi Shimbun contacted 26 local governments in Iwate and Miyagi prefectures to ascertain what evacuees in temporary housing were thinking in late January with regard to moving out. Fukushima Prefecture was not included in the survey since it has not completed such a study.

The Asahi survey showed that about 670 of 8,650 or so households in Iwate Prefecture have not found a place to move into or have no idea what to do once they leave the temporary housing.

In Miyagi Prefecture, about 2,030 of 19,800 or so households gave similar responses.

Those households are not believed to have applied for public housing for evacuees, which occupants can rent at a lower rate, or other forms of accommodation, either.

Households with no definite plans about where to live in the future include those that did not respond to some of the questions in the survey or were too sick to communicate properly.

Ishinomaki in Miyagi Prefecture had the largest number of households that remained undetermined about new homes, with 1,219 replying out of a total of 7,222.

"Since they are low-income households, many will face financial difficulty since they have to pay rent after they move into public housing earmarked for disaster victims," said an Ishinomaki official.

An official with city authorities in Ofunato, Iwate Prefecture, said evacuees suffering from serious health problems are unable to think straight about their future.

“Some people are too depressed to think about their future,” the official said, adding that “others could not respond since their dementia is too advanced.”

The survey found that about 140 households of 4,550 or so in the 12 municipalities of Iwate and Miyagi prefectures have still not decided what to do even though the extension of their duration of stay ends in April or later.

The comparable number stood at 2,560 out of 23,900 in the 14 localities.

(This article was written by Takashi Togo and Nobuyoshi Nakamura.)

Some Tohoku disaster-displaced to remain in shelters up to 10 years

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/07/national/social-issues/11-tohoku-disaster-displaced-remain-shelters-10-years-study-finds/#.Vt2XpeaDmot>

Kyodo

SENDAI – **Some of the people affected by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami will have to stay in temporary housing up to 10 years after the disaster**, a new survey shows.

Around 59,000 people, many of whom are elderly, were still living in the prefabricated makeshift housing in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures as of late January, although the number has decreased by almost half from its peak.

Japan will mark the fifth anniversary of the disaster Friday.

Forty-six municipalities in the northeastern prefectures were asked when they expected the evacuees to leave the housing complexes.

In the town of Otsuchi, Iwate Prefecture, nearly 2,900 people — a quarter of the town’s population — are still living in temporary housing. Officials there said it won’t be until around March 2021 at the earliest that everyone will be out of the units.

Devastated by the tsunami of March 11, 2011, Otsuchi has been working on moving people to higher ground, but it has faced difficulty finding appropriate land, the officials said.

Many other municipalities surveyed by Kyodo News said it will take until 2019 to complete the transfer of evacuees from makeshift housing.

Seventeen local governments said they could not make any forecast, including 11 in Fukushima Prefecture, where the ongoing crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant forced many residents to flee their homes.

After the 1995 massive earthquake that struck Kobe and other western Japan areas, it took five years for all the evacuees to leave their makeshift shelters.

Tokyo will host the 2020 Olympics, with the central government underscoring that the event will be an opportunity to show the world how Japan has rebuilt from the 2011 calamity that left over 15,000 people dead or missing.

Still searching for loved one

March 7, 2016

FIVE YEARS AFTER: In shadow of Fukushima plant, man searches for daughter

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201603070032

By YUKI CHAI/ Staff Writer

Yuna Kimura is the only resident of the Fukushima Prefecture town of Okuma who is still officially listed as missing from the 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

Norio Kimura, 50, has accepted that Yuna, his second daughter who was 7 years old when she disappeared five years ago, did not survive the disaster. But he refuses to submit the document officially certifying her death until he feels he has done everything possible to find her body.

Over the past four-and-a-half years, Norio's efforts have included donning bulky protective gear and scouring the coast and waters off Okuma, a town emptied of residents after the accident started at the nearby Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. And to continue his search, he has rejected offers from the government to buy his land.

On Dec. 13, 2015, Norio received an encouraging sign.

On the shoreline of Okuma, the father discovered a small, blue jacket with handwritten characters on a label sewn on the chest area. The words read: "Yuna Kimura, the second class in the first grade of Kumamachi Elementary."

"I feel that I am moving a step closer to Yuna," Norio said after seeing the jacket.

The Kimura home was located about 4 kilometers south of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant and 100 meters from the coast.

The tsunami five years ago swept away Yuna, Norio's wife, Miyuki, then 37, and his father, Wataro, then 77. The home, including the foundation, was destroyed.

Norio was working in a neighboring town when the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake struck on March 11, 2011. That evening, he made it back to where his home once stood and was greeted by the pet Doberman.

He spent the entire night searching for his three loved ones.

The following morning, Norio was forced to leave Okuma along with his 15-year-old daughter and 77-year-old mother after an evacuation order was issued because of the nuclear disaster.

In April, Wataro's body was found near the Kimura home. Miyuki's body was found off the coast of Iwaki in the prefecture.

But there was no sign of Yuna.

Norio resumed the search for his daughter at the end of 2011, using the opportunity for local residents to return for short periods to their homes. He had to make a round trip of about 1,000 kilometers from Hakuba, Nagano Prefecture, where he had settled with his mother and daughter.

He bought a commercial van in June 2012 and has since put in more than 150,000 km into the vehicle.

About three years ago, volunteers joined Norio's search for Yuna. Their participation helped to lift some of the psychological burden Norio felt when he conducted the search alone.

Norio now only returns to Okuma a few times a month to continue his search. So far, he has discovered about 50 items in the area near where the family home once stood.

In addition to Yuna's jacket, Norio has found the formal dress she wore for the entrance ceremony to elementary school, a photo taken before Norio and Miyuki were married and a shoe that Yuna was wearing on the day of the disaster.

In January 2014, Norio was informed that the land where his home once stood had been included in the planned site of an interim storage facility for soil contaminated with radioactive materials gathered from various parts of Fukushima Prefecture.

Five months later, an explanatory meeting was held for local residents about the planned construction of the facility.

"No matter what happens, I will never sell the land," Norio said at the meeting. "I cannot fathom not being able to enter that area."

Three years ago, Norio placed a statue of the Jizo guardian deity on a hill behind the site of where the home once stood. Carved into the statue are the names of the three loved ones he lost and a message: "I will never forget all three of you, and I will continue to think about you."

In autumn 2015, Norio planted rapeseed blossom seeds on about 3,000 square meters of rice paddies nearby. In February, Norio fertilized the field in hopes the yellow flowers would grow better.

"When the flowers bloom, it should be a pretty sky from up above," he said.

One happy story

March 7, 2016

FIVE YEARS AFTER: Photo found after tsunami poignant reminder of couple's pre-disaster days

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201603070022

By KENICHIRO SHINO/ Staff Writer

MINAMI-SANRIKU, Miyagi Prefecture--About a month after the March 2011 tsunami, Kiyokazu Kawatani found himself sifting through the rubble and debris left behind by the massive wave in this coastal area Tohoku town.

Stuck in the muck was a photograph of a young couple. Not knowing if the pair survived the calamity, the amateur photographer put the picture on display in his personal exhibition in nearby Tome in the fall of 2012.

When Shoko Kosaka saw the photograph in the exhibition she found her own smiling face looking back at her. Now 29, she told Kawatani that her fiancé also survived the tsunami and expressed her gratitude for discovering what is the couple's only remaining picture taken before the Great East Japan Earthquake. To show their appreciation, Kosaka and her fiancé, Kenji Haga, invited Kawatani to their wedding in July 2013. The memorial picture was projected on a large screen during the wedding ceremony.

"I never imagined that someone would find our pre-disaster picture, and I could meet that person to express my gratitude," Haga said. "It is a symbol of our special bond, which I call a miracle."

Kawatani first visited Minami-Sanriku after the towering tsunami generated by the magnitude-9.0 earthquake almost completely flattened the town center as a member of a volunteer team tasked to search for photographs and other items for survivors and victims' families.

It was during his three-day mission when he found the picture of Kosaka and Haga and a damaged cellphone on the property of a collapsed house near JR Shizuham Station.

The photo shows the smiling couple giving peace signs. A picture he took with the couple's photo and the cellphone became part of Kawatani's collection of photographs of disaster victims and devastated townscapes.

Before he quit his job in April 2012 as chief secretariat at the prefectural Nagano Kita High School in Kawachi-Nagano, Osaka Prefecture, he made 10 visits to Miyagi Prefecture. He eventually moved to Tome, a city about 20 kilometers inland from Minami-Sanriku, to participate in recovery efforts in the region.

In fall 2012, Kawatani held his first personal exhibition at a local farmhouse to display about 50 photographs that were taken during the 18-month period since the 2011 disaster, including the picture featuring the couple's photo and the damaged cellphone.

After Kosaka's family home was destroyed by the tsunami, she found a job in Tome, and her workplace was less than a kilometer from the farmhouse. She took in the exhibition after one of her colleagues told her that her picture was on display there.

"It is truly encouraging that you two survived the disaster," Kawatani told Haga when they met for the first time.

Haga barely escaped death after being engulfed by the tsunami at his family home. His grandfather remains missing.

The picture and Haga's cellphone were found near Haga's home. They turned out to be the only things left. The tsunami erased all physical traces of Haga's life before the earthquake.

Before the March 11, 2011, earthquake, Minami-Sanriku boasted a population of 17,000. Of those, 620 people were killed in the disaster, while 212 are still missing as of the end of February.

The Minami-Sanriku Volunteer Center still preserves the digitized data of about 150,000 pictures that have been found among the debris and wreckage. About 40,000 pictures have been returned to their owners, according to town officials.

How long will fishermen have to struggle?

March 7, 2016

FIVE YEARS AFTER: Fukushima fishermen still struggle to prove catches are safe

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201603070041>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Fukushima fishermen have been stuck in a vicious circle over the past five years. Whenever a glimmer of hope arises that they can resume normal operations, something happens at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant that quashes the optimism.

“Just when we thought the fishing environment had progressed one step forward, it would take a step back,” said Yukio Sato, a 56-year-old fisherman. “The past five years have been such a forward and back zigzag.”

Although radioactivity levels in their catches have fallen considerably, the fishermen are still struggling to convince consumers that the fish are safe to eat.

Any leak of radioactive water from the Fukushima No. 1 plant--and there have been many--into the Pacific Ocean reinforces the negative image of Fukushima fish.

The catches have dropped in size, prices have plummeted and some fishermen are now giving up hopes of making a living from the fishing grounds.

Sato used to take his fishing trawler out five days a week.

But fishermen in the prefecture were forced to suspend operations immediately after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. Radiation levels exceeding national standards were detected in the fish they caught.

“We could not catch the fish that we knew were swimming in those waters,” Sato said. “It was just so frustrating.”

Sato now takes his fishing trawler out twice a week.

The waters off Fukushima Prefecture are bountiful because two currents collide there. Close to 200 different types of fish can be caught in those waters.

In early February, Sato’s boat and other trawlers returned to the Matsukawaura fishing port in Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, carrying Pacific cod, monkfish, snow crab and other fish.

Sato’s catch totaled about 500 kilograms, and the fish were sent to local shops as well as the Tsukiji fish market in Tokyo.

“It would be great if we could return to the fishing of the past while I am still alive,” Sato said.

The catch from the coastal waters is still only about 6 percent of the levels before the nuclear accident.

In June 2012, more than year after the triple meltdown at the nuclear plant, experimental operations started to determine the market reaction to fish considered safe in terms of radioactivity levels.

Despite that effort, problems with radiation-contaminated water flowing into the Pacific continued.

Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, is still facing difficulties bringing the water problem under control. Every day, tons of groundwater flow under the Fukushima plant and become contaminated with radiation.

At one time, TEPCO came up with a plan to pump up the groundwater and dump it into the ocean before it could reach the plant.

Local fishermen opposed the plan because even dumping safe water into the Pacific would hurt the image of the fish caught in coastal waters.

But if such measures were not taken, the volume of contaminated water could increase to levels that would make it impossible to process.

In March 2014, the fishermen reluctantly agreed to the water bypass plan.

However, a year later, contaminated rainwater spilled outside the port waters. TEPCO’s failure to immediately disclose that problem refueled general concerns about contaminated water.

Other measures have since been taken to deal with the contaminated water, but according to one individual in the fishing industry, “No matter what is done, only the negative image that arises from that time is highlighted.”

Fishermen now depend on compensation from TEPCO for their daily livelihoods. Even those who are not engaged in experimental operations receive compensation equivalent to about 80 percent of their actual catch before the nuclear accident.

With no prospects for a resumption of full-scale operations, some fishermen are not bothering to take part in the experimental operations.

The radioactivity levels in the water and fish have steadily declined.

Three months after the nuclear accident started, half of the fish sampled had radioactivity levels exceeding the national standard of 100 becquerels per kg.

In 2015, 8,500 samples were tested; only four exceeded the national standard.

The decline in radioactivity levels has led to an expansion in the types of fish that can be caught through experimental operations, from three to 72.

While a simple comparison is not possible because the catch level in Fukushima is so low, fish caught through experimental operations fetch between 80 and 90 percent of the prices paid for the same fish types caught in other prefectures.

“With the brand image having fallen so low, it would not be profitable even if operations were allowed to expand,” said Takashi Niitsuma, 56, an official with the Iwaki city fisheries cooperative.

Fish caught further out to sea are also affected. Regardless of where the fish are caught, if they are brought to Fukushima ports, they are classified as being from Fukushima. That has led fishermen to avoid anchoring at Fukushima ports.

According to Fukushima prefectural government officials dealing with the fishing industry, about 5,600 tons of fish, excluding those caught in coastal waters, were brought into Fukushima ports in 2014. The figure is only 40 percent of the pre-nuclear accident level.

The Aquamarine Fukushima aquarium in Iwaki holds monthly events to show that fish caught off Fukushima are safe. At one recent event, a fat greenling was placed in a device to measure radiation levels while visitors looked on. A message flashed on a screen: “None detected.”

“Fish born after the nuclear accident will never exceed the central government’s standard,” said Seiichi Tomihara, 43, a veterinarian at the aquarium.

Local residents are involved in the project to dispel doubts about the trustworthiness of information provided by TEPCO and the central government.

“I first of all want people to understand the fact that the waters off Fukushima are steadily recovering,” Tomihara said.

(This article was written by Takuya Ikeda and Naoyuki Takahashi.)

Over 2,000 Fukushima evacuees dead

March 8, 2016

FIVE YEARS AFTER: Death toll of Fukushima evacuees tops 2,000

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201603080015

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

For days, neighbors lost sight of a man in his 50s who frequently took taxis from his temporary housing in Fukushima Prefecture to go out drinking.

A relative using a key borrowed from the local government office opened the man’s front door and found him dead at the entrance. The cause of death was apparently liver cirrhosis.

“The psychological stress from a life as an evacuee may have pushed him more toward the alcohol that he already loved,” a local source said.

In the five years since the accident started at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, 2,024 evacuees, including the hard-drinking man, have officially died of causes, often psychological, related to the 2011 triple disasters.

That death toll exceeds the 1,604 Fukushima residents who were directly killed by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

Over the same five-year period, the number of people who died of acute radiation exposure to substances spewed from the stricken plant is zero.

Life in evacuation has taken a heavy toll.

“The results cannot be simply attributed to the advanced age of the evacuees,” said Akira Isaka, an adviser to the Futaba county medical association who conducts health checks on evacuees. “A decrease in exercise due to life as an evacuee, stress, uncertainty about the future or the sense of hopelessness from having lost one’s purpose in life--an accumulation of all such factors has likely led to a worsening of their physical and psychological health.”

The evacuee who died in spring last year was originally from Katsurao, a village from which all residents were ordered to evacuate after the nuclear accident. The man lost his job on a ranch there.

An evaluation committee consisting of individuals from neighboring municipalities certified the man’s death as related to the 2011 disasters.

Certification of deceased individuals who were responsible for maintaining the livelihood of a household entitles bereaved family members to 5 million yen (\$44,000) in condolence money from the central and local governments. For bereaved family members of all other individuals, a payment of 2.5 million yen is made.

Another evacuee whose death was certified in February 2015 as disaster-related was Hiroshi Monma. He was 70 when he died in July 2014 from complications arising from pneumonia.

Monma once taught at a senior high school in Namie, Fukushima Prefecture.

According to his wife, Shoko, 73, Monma’s health declined rapidly after they evacuated to Tokyo following the nuclear accident. Six months later, he often could be heard muttering, “There is no use in living.”

Although there are more certified disaster-related deaths than direct deaths from the quake and tsunami, doctors involved in the certification process believe the number may not tell the entire story.

Many bereaved family members do not submit applications for such certification because it requires detailed health records.

The number of suicides among Fukushima disaster victims is also much higher than in the two prefectures that were also hard hit by the quake and tsunami.

According to Cabinet Office statistics, 80 evacuees in Fukushima Prefecture had killed themselves as of the end of 2015.

The annual number of suicides in Iwate and Miyagi prefectures has declined over the past five years. But the number in Fukushima for 2015 was 19, up from 15 in 2014.

Signs of depression were seen in 10 percent of residents of the 12 municipalities that were declared evacuation zones, according to a Fukushima prefectural government study. Although that ratio was an improvement over the level immediately after the nuclear accident, it is still about three times the national average.

“The only way to deal with the situation is to continue steady efforts to encourage evacuees to undergo periodic health checks and to increase their opportunities for exercise,” said Tomoyoshi Oikawa, deputy chief of the Minami-Soma Municipal General Hospital.

Mitsutoshi Kamata, 60, who heads a neighborhood association for temporary housing built adjacent to a residential area in Otama for evacuees from Tomioka, believes the displaced residents should look out for each other.

About 60 homes have been built for Tomioka evacuees in Otama.

Kamata came up with the idea of having the evacuees use yellow flags to show they are OK.

Yellow ribbons are a universal symbol of hope for those waiting to see their loved ones come home.

Kamata's idea stemmed from the flying of a yellow ribbon in a popular movie titled "The Yellow Handkerchief" in English and starring Ken Takakura.

Every morning, yellow flags the size of handkerchiefs are raised in front of each home's entrance, showing that the seniors living alone inside are fine. The flags are lowered at night.

One evening, the flag was still up in front of the home of an elderly man living by himself. He was found complaining of pain. The flag might have saved his life.

"We will not be able to prevent solitary deaths just with the flags," Kamata said. "It is important to have people around you who might realize something is wrong."

(This article was written by Yuri Oiwa, Makoto Takada and Mana Nagano.)

Placing hope in sunflowers

March 8, 2016

FIVE YEARS AFTER: Sunflowers give hope to man who lost family in tsunami

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/quake_tsunami/AJ201603080071

By MASATAKA YAMAURA/ Staff Writer

KAMAISHI, Iwate Prefecture--A tiny bag of sunflower seeds in the corner of a temporary housing unit has kept Kenichi Suzuki going since the 2011 disaster killed his family and left him all alone and despondent. "I have hoped that the sunflowers will bear flowers one more year, just one more year, until I can finally return to a life of normalcy," the 72-year-old said.

His sunflowers, planted in 2011 to pray for the repose of his family, have also established a connection with victims of one of Japan's other worst postwar disasters.

After the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake rocked the Tohoku region on March 11, 2011, setting off tsunami warnings, Suzuki, a volunteer firefighter in Kamaishi, headed to the port to close the floodgates.

He could only watch helplessly as the tsunami breached the floodgates and headed inland.

Suzuki narrowly survived by fleeing to higher ground. When he returned to his home after the water receded, he found it buried under debris.

Inside the remains of his ruined home were the bodies of his wife, Nobuko, 64, son Kenko, 44, Kenko's wife, Natsuko, 45, and their granddaughter, Riko, 11.

Kenko's arms were spread out as if he had tried to protect his relatives from the tsunami.

Suzuki had trouble breathing. Finally, he said, "Thank you," to his son.

The following spring, Suzuki went to the graduation ceremony of an elementary school to receive Riko's graduation certificate on her behalf.

Asked by school officials to say some words to the students, Suzuki said, "I would like all of you to pass down a lesson to other people as survivors."

Overcome with emotion, he could not continue the speech.

His granddaughter was the only child of the graduating class of 54 who was killed in the disaster.

Suzuki was tormented by the thought that had he stayed at home instead of going out to close the floodgates, he could have saved his family.

The city of Kamaishi had a population of 39,574 in 2010. The disaster killed 993 residents and left 152 missing.

With his home destroyed, Suzuki moved to temporary housing where he lived alone. He told people around him that he wanted to die.

At a funeral service held for his family in summer 2011, a local woman who runs a ryokan inn handed Suzuki dozens of sunflower seeds, as well as a picture book describing the story behind the seeds.

The seeds came from sunflowers planted each year across Japan in memory of a girl who was killed in the Great Hanshin Earthquake of January 1995, which left more than 6,400 dead in Kobe and the surrounding area.

Suzuki cleared the wreckage at the site of his home in Kamaishi and planted the seeds. In that neighborhood, the ground was bare except for the foundations of structures wiped out by the tsunami.

That summer, dozens of sunflowers bloomed in the once-barren area.

Suzuki brought a bench near the flowers so that he could view them to his heart's content.

The next summer, the seeds he planted again bore hundreds of sunflowers against a background that was mostly gray because of the slow rebuilding process.

This time, he was not alone in viewing the sunflowers. Other people, struck by the yellow carpet of flowers, stopped by, and Suzuki began sharing memories of his family with them. One of them was a woman from Saitama Prefecture.

In spring last year, she contacted Suzuki and asked for seeds from his sunflowers.

She sent him a photo album in January this year, explaining that 25 of the pictures were of sunflowers her friends in various parts of the country grew from the seeds Suzuki had provided. She named the seeds Riko-chan sunflowers after his granddaughter.

"Let's carry on living with big smiles to match the sunflowers," her handwritten message said in the album.

Five years after the disaster, Suzuki can finally prepare for the next stage in his life. The long-stalled project to elevate the ground for his home has started to move forward, and he plans to return to the site as early as autumn.

Despite harboring mixed feelings, Suzuki has continued his work as a volunteer firefighter. But he will retire from the physically demanding firefighting activities this spring.

"All I can do is to do something for the repose of their souls," Suzuki said.

In his new house, a room will display Riko's graduation certificate and her orange school backpack that turned up near the former home.

He will also plant sunflowers at a place where he can view them from that room.

New technologies to cope with catastrophes

March 7, 2016

More technologies against disaster developed (short video)

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160307_14/

Japanese electronics manufacturers are working to create a variety of technologies to cope with catastrophes. It's now days away from the 5th anniversary of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in northeastern Japan.

Fuji Electric has an early warning system to detect possible damage to buildings soon after an earthquake strikes. It uses sensors to check if a building is at risk of collapsing.

It issues an alarm within minutes of a quake occurring, including one to evacuate.

NEC is working on analyzing camera footage in public places to identify likely accident spots. That's in case an earthquake or other disasters leave many commuters stranded at train stations and other areas.

Mitsubishi Electric wants to commercialize a technology to help with communication.

It sprays sea water into the air to form an antenna to receive television broadcasts or a phone signal. It uses the sea water's ability to conduct electricity.

Urging Hong Kong to lift ban on Fukushima food

March 8, 2016

Fukushima officials brief Hong Kong on food safety

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160308_02/

Officials from Fukushima are urging Hong Kong to lift the import ban on food from the prefecture that was imposed after the nuclear accident nearly five years ago.

Hong Kong was the prefecture's biggest export destination before the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant accident.

Japanese food is widely popular with Hong Kong consumers.

The territory used to account for 80 percent of the prefecture's agricultural, forestry, and fisheries exports, including its specialty peaches.

Hong Kong banned imports of fruit and vegetables from Fukushima and four other prefectures.

On Monday, Fukushima representatives briefed Hong Kong media and officials about on-going measures to ensure food safety. About 40 journalists and local officials attended the briefing.

Prefectural officials say radiation levels in most areas have dipped to about the same levels found in most other major cities in the world.

They also say none of the food which was tested for radioactive materials last year exceeded permissible levels, excluding some marine products. Prefectural officials are calling for the ban to be lifted.

A representative from a dried persimmon producer group says they peeled and decontaminated the bark from 250,000 persimmon trees.

He says it took three years to resume production.

One Hong Kong newspaper reporter confessed to not knowing about the food checks in the region, but said more trust should be placed in Fukushima.

Kenji Kokubun, who is in charge of agricultural produce distribution in Fukushima, says when people are not informed, they understand things wrongly and demagoguery and false rumors may appear.

He says producers would like to inform people of the checks that are in place, and get people to see how hard the farming community is working.

What is the priority?

Editorial: Give priority to putting disaster victims' lives back in order

March 9, 2016 (Mainichi Japan)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160309/p2a/00m/0na/012000c>

Efforts to restore regions hit by the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and ensuing nuclear crisis and the livelihoods of residents in affected areas have come to the crossroads as March 11 marks the fifth anniversary of the triple disasters. The government is ending its intensive reconstruction period and is poised to implement a new policy to support disaster-ravaged areas.

About 30 percent of communities ravaged by tsunami have completed their relocation to higher ground, but there are many areas that face harsh realities, such as depopulation and the aging of society. It is necessary to consider what is needed to support the livelihoods of disaster victims.

Newly built houses are lined in a residential area developed on a hilly area in the Koizumi district of southern Kesennuma, Miyagi Prefecture, which faces the Pacific coast.

Residents of the Koizumi district, hit hard by the tsunami, began consultations on relocation of their entire neighborhood to higher ground shortly after the disasters. The construction of the new residential area based on advice from scholars is viewed as a model of local resident-led regional development.

However, some unexpected problems have surfaced over the past five years. Some people unable to wait for the development of the new residential area acquired land lots in other areas while others left their

hometown. Koizumi residents had initially planned to develop 90 land lots but actually created 65. Some 17 of them remain unsold.

The biggest problem for residents of the area is that little progress has been made on efforts to attract shops to their neighborhood, forcing residents to go far away for shopping. Many households in reconstruction housing units in the same district comprise of elderly people. Shigeaki Oikawa, who served as a coordinator in the relocation of the neighborhood, says, "Government organizations should pay closer attention to securing means of transportation for us."

Over the five-year intensive reconstruction period, the national government set aside 26 trillion yen for disaster recovery efforts. In particular, the central government has characterized relocation of neighborhoods devastated by tsunami to inland areas or higher ground and land elevation and readjustment projects as the core of what it calls "creative reconstruction." Projects to relocate tsunami-hit neighborhoods to higher ground materialized in many areas because the central government agreed to fully foot the cost of such relocations.

In some regions, such relocation projects were carried out smoothly thanks to in-depth discussions among local residents, like one in Iwanuma, Miyagi Prefecture. Projects to relocate whole neighborhoods hit by tsunami to higher ground have played a certain role in maintaining these communities.

In many other areas, however, such relocation projects were not carried out as planned. Many residents were forced to abandon moving to new neighborhoods as time went by. As a result, the number of households covered by these projects in all the disaster-ravaged areas decreased by some 8,000 from approximately 28,000 as initially planned.

Many coastal areas in the Tohoku region have been suffering from depopulation and the aging of their populations for many years. The Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and the nuclear crisis have further contributed to the outflow of younger people. According to the latest census, all municipalities in coastal areas of Iwate Prefecture saw their populations shrink from pre-disaster periods. In Miyagi Prefecture, the populations in Onagawa and Minamisanriku among other municipalities decreased sharply.

Some neighborhoods that relocated to higher ground or inland areas are just like marginal villages because there are few young residents. Serious questions remain as to whether these neighborhoods will be able to maintain their communities in the long run.

It is expected to take a considerable amount of time to complete large-scale projects to elevate land in the Iwate Prefecture city of Rikuzentakata and other areas. One cannot help but wonder whether it is appropriate to force residents of these areas to live in temporary housing for more than five years while waiting until the elevation work is completed. The national government should scrutinize whether it could have shown residents sufficient options regarding reconstruction methods that suit the situation of each area.

The government should be aware that many residents face difficulties in putting their livelihoods back in order because the reconstruction of their housing has been delayed. Officials regard the next five years as a period when the government will aim to complete its disaster recovery efforts. However, much of the 6.5 trillion yen that will be set aside for recovery efforts over that period will be used for building infrastructure, such as storm surge barriers and roads.

The central government should shift its disaster recovery efforts from public works projects to livelihood assistance and the creation of new industries. Projects for building large-scale storm surge barriers with the aim of blocking tsunami, which stirred controversy over landscape conservation, are being delayed because of a shortage of construction materials and soaring personnel costs. The necessary height of such levees should be flexibly reviewed.

Priority should be placed on efforts to create new jobs and maintain regional communities. Even if communities in disaster areas are urged to be independent and self-reliant, this would not sufficiently tap the latent strength of regional communities. Private-sector ideas are becoming more important under such efforts rather than assistance that the central and local governments extend to disaster-ravaged areas.

There are good examples of efforts to revitalize the economies in disaster areas. In Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, "Ishinomaki 2.0," an organization made up of local residents and those from other prefectures, is promoting the revitalization of the local economy. The organization is aiming to build better neighborhoods than the pre-disaster period under the slogan, "We never think of restoring our town to the pre-3.11 (March 11) situation."

Specifically, the group is carrying out projects to support young people's efforts to start businesses in the city after they visited the area to participate in volunteer activities and promoting exchanges between these young people. Architect Tsukasa Nishida, 40, a resident of Yokohama who is involved in the group's activities, says, "Participation of young people living outside is necessary for disaster recovery."

Young people who have moved to the Karakuwa Peninsula in Kesennuma, Miyagi Prefecture, from various other areas have launched a project to revitalize the local economy. Close attention should be paid to these activities even though they are still small-scale.

Use of vacant lots and vacant rooms in newly developed residential areas on higher ground and reconstruction housing will likely pose a challenge. It is necessary to consider allowing young people, who are interested in the reconstruction of disaster-ravaged areas, to move into these vacant lots and rooms. Such efforts will help maintain communities in these areas.

The situation of disaster-hit regions that suffer from depopulation and the aging of their populations reflect Japan's future. The government as well as the general public should take the reconstruction of disaster-ravaged areas as a task for the entire nation and support such efforts from a long-term perspective.

Difficult to secure enough personnel in disaster-hit areas

Editorial: Personnel shortages a challenge to local gov'ts in disaster-hit areas

March 8, 2016 (Mainichi Japan)

Japanese version

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160308/p2a/00m/0na/012000c>

Officials of local governments across the country who have been dispatched to regions hit by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami are playing a key role in supporting affected local bodies' disaster recovery efforts. So far, over 90,000 prefectural and municipal government officials have been dispatched to disaster-hit areas, and currently some 2,200 are engaged in various such projects, according to the national government.

Since there is expected to be demand for numerous human resources in disaster areas over the next several years, the national government and local bodies across the country need to do their utmost to

secure the necessary personnel. As preparations for future disasters, local governments should build multi-layered cooperative relations between themselves.

In the March 2011 disasters, municipal governments' functions mainly in Iwate and Miyagi prefectures were paralyzed after their offices were hit by tsunami. More than one-third of some 300 officials currently with the Otsuchi Municipal Government in Iwate Prefecture are those loaned by other local governments. Many local bodies in affected regions need personnel who can handle massive amounts of clerical work associated with the relocation of neighborhoods to higher ground to avoid future tsunami, among other projects. Apart from officials dispatched from prefectural governments, those from municipal governments who are more familiar with administrative work linked directly to local communities played a key role in supporting such work. The March 2011 disasters reminded national and local governments as well as the general public of the importance of cooperation between local bodies.

However, it is becoming difficult to secure enough personnel to dispatch to disaster-hit areas as nearly five years passed since the earthquake and tsunami. The demand for personnel will peak over the next several years in disaster areas where infrastructure reconstruction work is under way. Nevertheless, local governments outside disaster areas face increasing difficulties dispatching sufficient workers to disaster areas because local bodies have downsized their organizations and for other reasons.

In fiscal 2015, local governments in disaster-ravaged areas asked their counterparts outside the affected regions via the national government to dispatch about 1,400 officials. However, outside local bodies were able to dispatch only about 1,200 workers. Local governments in affected areas have asked for the dispatch of some 1,550 officials to help with disaster recovery work in fiscal 2016.

The central government has asked the National Governors' Association and the Japan Association of City Mayors for cooperation. However, there are no prospects that local bodies can dispatch a sufficient number of workers to disaster areas.

If it is difficult to secure enough employees, more retirees who have expertise should be employed on fixed-term contracts and dispatched to disaster-hit regions. Shortening the term of dispatch of local government officials may need to be considered although many local bodies in disaster-ravaged regions ask that officials be dispatched for one year.

It is also important to put experiences that local government officials had during their dispatch to disaster areas to good use. Officials who have experience of working in disaster areas should be registered in a system like a human resource bank and lessons learned from work in disaster areas should be shared between local government officials in preparation for responses to future disasters.

There are examples of ordinance-designated cities and other major cities supporting affected local bodies' disaster recovery efforts as partners. The Nagoya Municipal Government has extended intensive assistance to the Rikuzentakata Municipal Government, such as the dispatch of nearly 200 officials to the disaster-hit city in Iwate Prefecture. The two cities have also deepened their relations through exchanges of children.

According to the Fire and Disaster Management Agency, the number of local governments that have signed agreements with their counterparts in other prefectures on mutual assistance in case of serious disasters has increased since the March 2011 disasters. Currently, 1,240 local bodies have such agreements, accounting for about 70 percent of municipalities across the nation. Local governments should try to expand such cooperative relations in preparation for mutual assistance in case of a massive natural disaster.

37% of voluntary evacuees are under 20

March 9, 2016

37% of Fukushima voluntary evacuees are minors: Mainichi survey

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160309/p2a/00m/0na/007000c>

There were about 16,000 voluntary evacuees from municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture as of January this year in connection with the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, and 37 percent of them were below the age of 20, according to a survey conducted by the Mainichi Shimbun.

The Mainichi conducted a questionnaire of municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture where voluntary evacuees had lived prior to the outbreak of the nuclear crisis. The survey found that 37 percent of about 16,000 voluntary evacuees identified by relevant municipal governments as of January were people under age 20. Those in their 30s and 40s -- the parental generation -- accounted for a combined total of 36 percent of the voluntary evacuees, the survey shows. The findings underscore the fact that the voluntary evacuation of child-rearing households worried about radiation exposure has been prolonged.

The central government did not issue evacuation orders for 48 of the 59 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture. The Mainichi asked these 48 municipalities (including Hirono which issued an evacuation order on its own) how many of their residents took refuge in and outside the prefecture on a voluntary basis and the number of such residents by age.

There were 16,063 voluntary evacuees as of January, but the actual number of such evacuees is believed to be larger because many of the municipal governments tally the number based on the number of registrations evacuees filed from their temporary shelters with the "National Information System for Refugees" run by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications on a voluntary basis.

By age bracket, 19.7 percent of voluntary evacuees were those under 10 years old, 17.4 percent were those between ages 10 and 19, 7.3 percent were those in their 20s, 19.4 percent were those in their 30s, 16.7 percent were those in their 40s, 6.6 percent were those in their 50s, 6.1 percent were those in their 60s, 3.8 percent were those in their 70s, 2.7 percent were those at age 80 or older, and 0.4 percent were those whose ages were unknown.

According to statistics compiled by the internal affairs ministry as of September 2015, those people below the age of 20 accounted for 17.4 percent of Japan's total population and those in their 30s and 40s accounted for a combined total of 27.0 percent. As compared with those figures, the percentages of the voluntary evacuees in the corresponding age brackets stood out, with those evacuees below the age of 20 accounting for 37.1 percent of the total and those in their 30s and 40s accounting for a combined total of 36.0 percent.

Of those voluntary evacuees, 4,593 of them had lived in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Koriyama before the outbreak of the nuclear crisis, 4,047 resided in Fukushima city and 1,290 lived in Iwaki -- the top three cities accounting for more than 60 percent of the total.

Meanwhile, of the 11 municipalities for which the central government issued evacuation orders (including those such as Naraha for which evacuation orders have already been lifted), the total number of voluntary evacuees from four municipalities that had both compulsory and voluntary evacuees was roughly estimated at about 8,000. But detailed age brackets for the voluntary evacuees from the four municipalities were not ascertained.

Based on the number of evacuees living in public housing complexes and housing units rented by the Fukushima Prefectural Government across the country and other data, the prefectural government estimated the number of voluntary evacuees as of the end of last October at around 18,000. The actual

total number of voluntary evacuees is not known as there are apparently many other voluntary evacuees living in private housing units and other facilities.

How many will really return home?

March 10, 2016

FIVE YEARS AFTER: 1 in 3 Fukushima evacuees giving up hope of ever returning home

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201603100059>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

More than one in three evacuees from the Fukushima nuclear disaster despair of ever returning home, a finding that points to a growing sense of hopelessness five years after the crisis unfolded.

This stark reality emerged in a survey carried out by The Asahi Shimbun and a research team headed by Akira Imai, a professor of local government policy at Fukushima University.

"There are so many people (outside Fukushima) today who are not aware that many people are still forced to live as evacuees," a 34-year-old woman responded in the survey questionnaire. "No matter how we try to explain our plight, they seem unable to understand, and we feel saddened to realize that people tend to think we live outside our hometowns out of our own choice."

Many respondents also wrote they were troubled by a perceived envy from other residents in their new communities over the compensation they receive from Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

In the survey, of those who remain evacuated, 22 percent said they think they can return to their old homes within five years, 17 percent believe they can return home within 10 years and 9 percent said it might take up to 20 years.

Fourteen percent said it will take 21 years or longer to return home, while the remaining 38 percent said they believed they would never be able to return permanently.

As of March 9, the number of Fukushima residents living as evacuees within Fukushima Prefecture stood at 54,175. On Feb. 12, prefectural authorities reported that 43,149 evacuees were living outside the prefecture.

It was the fifth such survey by The Asahi Shimbun and Imai's research team and was undertaken to mark the fifth anniversary of the nuclear accident, triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, on March 11.

Questionnaires were sent to 398 evacuees who had responded to previous polls. Of the 225 respondents in Tokyo and 20 prefectures, 36, or 16 percent, said they had returned to their old homes.

Among those who remain evacuated, 65 people currently live in temporary housing for disaster victims, followed by 52 who have settled in homes they newly purchased.

Forty-one percent of those who remain evacuated said they want to eventually return to their old homes when their hometowns become safe, while 25 percent said they no longer want to return because it is unlikely the areas will ever be safe again.

The survey showed that evacuees are increasingly losing the will to hold on in their current plight, with only 32 percent of respondents saying they are determined to hold on, down from 55 percent in the previous survey in 2013.

Eighteen percent said they are losing the will to hold on. The same percentage said they are tormented by simmering anger. Both figures were up from the previous survey.

(This article was written by Takuro Negishi and Kenji Izawa.)

Voices of Fukushima evacuees

March 9, 2016

Five years on, Fukushima evacuees voice lingering anger, fear and distrust

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2016/03/09/voices/five-years-fukushima-evacuees-voice-lingering-anger-fear-distrust/#.VuEfTeaDmov>

by Sarai Flores

Five years after the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster that devastated northern Japan in March 2011, some 100,000 evacuees have still not returned to their homes in Fukushima Prefecture, parts of which were heavily contaminated by radiation in the wake of the reactor meltdowns.

Of these evacuees, just over half are living inside the prefecture, while 43,000 are scattered across the rest of the archipelago. Of the roughly 57,000 displaced within Fukushima, 18,322 are still living in temporary housing units.

The government has begun lifting the compulsory evacuation orders for some communities in the former no-go zone surrounding Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s tsunami-hit Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, and plans to remove any remaining restrictions in March of next year.

However, many Fukushima evacuees are reluctant to return. They fear that radiation in some areas is still high despite the huge decontamination effort that has been underway for the past five years. They also worry that compensation for their ordeal since March 2011 from the government and Tepco will be cut or disappear altogether if they decide to restart life in their former hometowns. Those who chose to vacate their homes outside the designated exclusion zone are also deeply concerned about the prospect of losing the right to stay in temporary accommodation a year from now and being left with no choice but to return. At a recent event in Tokyo titled "Voices of the Evacuees of Fukushima," and at a press conference last week organized by the Liaison Committee for Organizations of Victims of the Nuclear Disaster, a handful of representatives of these thousands of uprooted Fukushima residents spoke out about the ordeal that began five years ago with the earthquake, tsunami and multiple meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 plant, and which continues to exact a toll to this day. Here are some of those voices:

Mr. Segaya, who would only be identified by his surname due to privacy concerns, has been living in Saitama Prefecture with his family since opting to evacuate from his home in Koriyama, 60 km west of Fukushima No. 1.

"Many evacuees have fears about whether the decontamination efforts by the government are accurate or not and how they are carried out," Segaya said. "In Koriyama and Fukushima, sometimes they cut down

trees and sometimes they don't. In one city, where they cut down trees, they burn them non-stop. In the other, the trees can't be burned in incinerators. We are not sure which is better. To be honest, some say that the radiation doesn't drop if trees are cut down. So you hear stories of people with different accounts — some have cut their trees chopped in half and saw a lowering of radiation, others didn't see any drop."

Segaya is most concerned about the safety of his children if he moves back to Koriyama.

"When our kids come back from playing in the dirt in Saitama, my wife yells at them saying, 'What are you doing?' I just smile at them because they are boys and just pat them lightly on the head to scold them, but if this were to happen in Fukushima, soft scolding wouldn't be enough," he said. "In Fukushima we don't know which areas are decontaminated and which aren't. At our home in Koriyama the geiger counter sadly still rings."

Segaya explained that in Koriyama it rains a lot, which is another source of fear for evacuees who return. The water, he said, can reach "up to around my knees, and the dirt rises and spreads when it dries up. When I call the Koriyama council to tell them about the situation, all I get is 'At this point, we cannot tell you what to do about this issue.' So even if I'm told it's safe to go back, I don't feel like I want to return." Segaya said that following the disaster, his two eldest sons were covered in cysts "like frogs," and he feared the growths might be cancerous.

"The Fukushima Medical University doctors say that cysts are common, and that they show up and disappear, but I can't trust them. Similarly, he said, "Even if they say it's decontaminated, I can't bring myself to (have my family) return to somewhere where the radiation is still so high."

Speaking about job prospects and the difficulties in getting back on his feet, Segaya said the Japanese job-hunting system — *shūkatsu* in Japanese — can be a drawn-out process involving months of sitting written tests and attending group workshops and interviews.

"At my age, to go through applying for another job, sadly, I don't have the courage," Segaya explained.

"And now our savings are depleting. When the housing compensation stops, what do we do?"

"Do I sell our house, which is surrounded with bags full of contaminated soil? I know it will sell. People living in the Hamadori region (on the coast) would buy the house because the radiation level there is much higher than here. But is it right to sell a house like that? Something in me questions the ethics of that."

Kayo Watanabe left her home in Fukushima city, 60 km northwest of the No. 1 plant, at the height of uncertainty about the true extent of the 2011 nuclear disaster. She now lives with her children in Yonezawa, Yamagata Prefecture, 45 km farther inland from the stricken nuclear plant on the coast. As is the case with many other evacuee families, her husband didn't follow them. He is still working in Fukushima, the city where his extended family also lives.

"We are in the fifth floor of a welfare housing building with no elevator, so I have to climb the stairs every day," Watanabe said. "It's an old building dating back to 1985. At the time (of the disasters) there was no heating and we had to take cold showers. Daily life is very inconvenient."

There are still many mother-and-children clusters of evacuees, Watanabe explained, but some have gone back, preferring for their families to be together.

However, she said, "I'm still concerned about going back while the decontamination is not finished."

Watanabe said that her husband visits after work, but the journeys back and forth on top of his work commute leave him exhausted.

"My children are getting used to the situation of not having a father around, which is not good," she said.

"There are a lot of divorces, too. When families are apart, this happens."

children in Yonezawa, Yam

g nuclear disaster, Mr. Suzuki, his wife and four children made the decision to leave their home in Nihonmatsu, 45 km northwest of the stricken No. 1 nuclear plant.

“Why did I and my family evacuate? Simple: It’s because I feared radiation. I still remember the 1986 Chernobyl accident and knew how terrible radiation is,” said Suzuki, who didn’t give his first name. “Our house in Fukushima was an old one. It was my wife’s father’s old wooden house, with thin walls and space where outside air comes through.”

“We were at this house on March 27, 2011, and when I measured the radiation, it was about 9 microsieverts outside, and inside 3 to 4 microsieverts. When I measured it after the decontamination, it was about 0.2 microsieverts, and now it’s between 0.1 and 0.2 microsieverts, and it’s basically the same inside the house and outside. So, when dust and wind comes in, or when the cat we have comes in, radiation enters the house. But I can’t just kill the cat.”

The government’s decontamination efforts have involved the removal of topsoil and other contaminated material in areas registering high radioactivity in a bid to bring levels down to an acceptable level. These materials are then sealed in black plastic bags and stored in their thousands at temporary sites across the prefecture. Material registering higher than 8,000 becquerels per kilogram is classed as radioactive waste. “In 2012, when we measured the soil, it was 80,000 becquerels (per kg),” Suzuki said. “They will decontaminate the houses, but not the mountains. So we have to continue to stay away.”

Suzuki said that traveling between Yonezawa, where his family are living, Nihonmatsu and Fukushima city, he spends ¥50,000 on gasoline a month. This puts a strain on his finances because he only makes ¥150,000 a month.

“I want to say that the compensation should continue,” Suzuki said. “They (the government and Tepco) don’t even take any responsibility, and I want to tell them to go to hell. The responsibility lies with the government and Tepco, so they should provide us with a range of options. Instead, it’s only one option: ‘Go back because it’s safe,’ and also saying that we, those still staying away, are overreacting. But safety — our safety — is not what the government or Tepco should decide, right? The fact is, the radiation level at my house in Fukushima is still too high.”

Mr. Arai is a “voluntary” evacuee from Iwaki, a city 50 km south of Fukushima No. 1. He is now living with his family in a public housing unit in Edogawa Ward, Tokyo, alongside 84 families from Tohoku, the majority from Fukushima.

“People think we live off high compensation money, but the fact is that it is very low. And this will end at the end of March next year,” said Arai. “It’s been years since the disaster and there are various concerns people harbor. But, I beg you, please let us live somewhere until we all feel assured, and then can say thank you.”

“It is not just economic issues,” Arai continued. “There are many evacuees who are elderly with illnesses, for whom moving around is not easy. I had to evacuate with my four children and 90-something-year-old parents when I first came to Tokyo, and moved around several times until I found this housing.

“It was very difficult and we stumbled upon many hardships along the way,” Arai explained. “Our children are having to struggle through with scholarships and side jobs. We can’t even live up to our responsibilities as parents to provide for our children.”

Kenichi Hasegawa, a dairy farmer from Iitate, a village 40 km northwest of Fukushima No. 1, was forced to evacuate on April 22, 2011. Although he has been living in a temporary housing facility in Date city, 20 km farther north, ever since, Hasegawa is completely against the lifting of the remaining evacuation orders for areas surrounding the nuclear plant.

“Those of us directly affected by the Fukushima accident are very much concerned and very much against this move,” he said. “However, the government is trying to push forward with the (Tokyo 2020) Olympics as a way to cover up the situation and send out the message that Japan is now safe.”

Hasegawa says decontamination work in Iitate has been going on for three years but is still only 50 percent complete. The government has declared that decontamination of the village will be complete by the end of the year.

“I believe that this is completely impossible,” said Hasegawa. “We are all being forced to face the decision of whether to abandon our village or to return despite the fact that radiation levels in the village are still very high.

“I believe that one of our greatest concerns as regards contamination and radiation levels in our village is the soil. As for my own home, there is a forest area just behind it, and the official word is that the decontamination there has already been finished. So, I did my own sampling of the soil in this area that has been declared decontaminated, and the result of this sampling was actually 2,600 becquerels per kg of the soil behind my house. This is three times the national standard.”

Hasegawa explained that the analysis of topsoil he collected was performed by Nihon University professor Koji Itonaga, who also measured radiation levels in his cedar trees.

Iitate was only evacuated a month after the nuclear meltdowns, although it was exposed to higher levels of radiation than most areas within the original evacuation zone at the height of the disaster.

“At first the designation was made with just this straight circle around the plant, and we were designated as being outside of the 30 km area,” explained Hasegawa. “We were completely left behind and not included at all within the evacuation. However, because the contamination levels in Iitate were so high that they could no longer be hidden, a month later Iitate was included in the compulsory evacuation area. “We know now, for example, that the data from SPEEDI about where the plume was going and so on was very clear — that the radiation was going northwest of the plant at the time — yet this data was hidden,” said Hasegawa.

SPEEDI is a supercomputer that provides real-time assessment of radiation levels in nuclear emergencies. Hasegawa says he is receiving monthly compensation of ¥100,000 from Tepco for mental stress caused by the disaster. However, compensation for individuals who lost their businesses following the disaster is calculated according to the amount of sales of that business.

“If the business did not actually have profits at the time — if it was even in the red, for example, prior to the disaster — then there is no compensation being given for this. So the compensation we are receiving corresponds to the profits that were declared by that business,” said Hasegawa.

Kazuhiko Amano worked as the head of the evacuation center set up at the Big Palette convention site from April 2011 until the following year.

“The nuclear accident is not over,” he said. “It is clear the evacuees need on-going support. They lost their jobs and daily lives through no fault of their own, so I believe the government needs to provide them with security.

“The evacuees are mentally weakened from thinking all day about whether they will or will not return to their hometowns. As their lives as evacuees lengthen, we are seeing many secondary deaths,” he said, referring to those recognized as being linked to the triple disaster rather than directly caused by the initial quake and tsunami. “These are especially high among those from Fukushima compared to evacuees from Miyagi and Iwate prefectures.”

Out of the overall total number of deaths, said Amano, “For Miyagi and Iwate, the percentage of secondary deaths is 8 percent. For Fukushima, it is 55 percent. This is an unusually high number. So, this also suggests that the biggest challenge for Fukushima is the ‘recovery of the soul.’ “

Translations by Yuri Ota, Ippei Watanabe and Hirotugu Yamamoto. Foreign Agenda offers a forum for opinion about issues related to life in Japan. Your comments and story ideas: community@japantimes.co.jp

Elderly 3/11 victims stuck in public housing

March 9, 2016

FIVE YEARS AFTER: Elderly 3/11 victims most likely to live in public housing

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201603090027

By TAKASHI TOGO/ Staff Writer

Elderly people in the Tohoku region are disproportionately stuck in special public housing five years on from the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, an Asahi Shimbun survey has shown.

Some 37.8 percent of disaster victims still living in special public housing in the three prefectures hit hardest by the disaster--Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima--are 65 or older, underscoring the difficulties older people face in rebuilding their homes on their own.

By comparison, 27.3 percent of the three prefectures' population is 65 or older, so the survey showed that the percentage of people in that age group living in public housing complexes for disaster victims was considerably higher than might be expected.

The survey, which drew its data from two prefectural governments and 50 city, town and village offices that manage special public housing, also showed that 29.8 percent of elderly residents lived alone in special public housing for disaster victims.

It covered 25,860 people living in 12,507 public housing units, and found that 9,787 of those people were aged 65 or older at the beginning of this year, including 2,920 individuals that lived alone.

The ratio of elderly residents in special public housing is highest in Fukushima Prefecture at 39.2 percent, followed by 38.7 percent in Iwate and 37.1 percent in Miyagi.

Among municipalities with at least 100 residents still living in special public housing, Shiogama, Miyagi Prefecture, had the highest proportion, with 56 percent of such residents being 65 or older, followed by 50.4 percent in Shichigahama and 50.3 percent in Onagawa, both in Miyagi.

In Shiogama, Shichigahama and Natori in Miyagi Prefecture, the percentage of elderly people living in special public housing was higher by more than 20 percentage points compared with the average proportion of elderly people in those areas.

"Financial institutions often refuse to offer housing loans to elderly people, leaving them with no option but to stay in public housing," said an official of Shiogama city in charge of public housing programs.

"They also opt to remain in public housing because they think it is not worth investing much money to rebuild their homes because they have limited life expectancy."

In the wake of the Great Hanshin Earthquake in western Japan in 1995, the concentration of elderly residents in special public housing emerged as an issue.

As residents aged, community bonds in such housing complexes were weakened, often leading to isolation of residents and even unattended deaths.

"We hope to support residents' initiatives to create community associations and other residents' groups, so that they can monitor and help each other," said an official of the Sendai city government, which has the largest number of 492 elderly people living alone in public housing for disaster victims.

2,562 people missing still

March 9, 2016

FIVE YEARS AFTER: 2,562 people still missing as 5th anniversary of 3/11 approaches

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201603090067

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

For the families of 2,562 people still listed as missing, the fifth anniversary March 11 of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami disaster offers no closure.

The National Police Agency updated its list of missing people on March 8, noting that most of the victims were from the hardest-hit prefectures of Miyagi, Iwate and Fukushima in northeastern Japan.

The NPA said its report reflected the number of people who remained missing since the disaster as of the end of February.

It said the number of fatalities rose by 4 over the past year to 15,894 in 12 prefectures, while the number of people missing declined by 27 to 2,562 in six prefectures.

The number of deaths totaled 15,827 in the three hardest-hit prefectures: 9,541 in Miyagi, 4,673 in Iwate and 1,613 in Fukushima.

The number of bodies still unidentified stands at 59 in Iwate and 16 in Miyagi.

The number of people missing stands at 1,237 in Miyagi, 1,124 in Iwate and 197 in Fukushima, the NPA said.

Coastal land remains vacant

March 9, 2016

FIVE YEARS AFTER: No plans for over 40% of post-3/11 purchased land in coastal areas

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201603090025>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

More than 40 percent of coastal land purchased by municipal governments in three prefectures after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami remains vacant with no utilization plans, an Asahi Shimbun survey showed.

Municipalities hit by the disasters in March 2011 relocated residential areas to hilly and inland areas and purchased coastal plots from their owners.

The purchased lands total about 2,028 hectares in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures. Municipal governments are mainly making plans for companies to set up factories or offices on the vacant properties, but progress is going slowly.

The Asahi Shimbun asked 26 coastal municipalities in the three prefectures about the status of those purchased lands as of February this year. At that point they had decided on how to utilize 1,150 hectares, or 57 percent, of the land.

The municipalities have no plans, or are still considering how to use the remaining 878 hectares, or 43 percent. And in 188 of those 878 hectares, the municipalities are not likely to work out plans for utilizing them in fiscal 2016, which starts in April.

Of the 1,150 hectares of land where uses have been decided, 57 hectares are accounted for by those where the land has already been used or has been prepared for particular purposes.

Many of these are utilized or are being prepared to be used as parks or fishing equipment yards--usages that are unlikely to lead those municipalities to economic recovery.

Before the March 11, 2011, disasters, some of the 2,028 hectares were in central areas of the municipalities. Due to this, the municipal governments hoped that companies would set up factories or offices on these sites to create jobs and revive the areas.

The city government of Iwanuma in Miyagi Prefecture plans to use 87 of its 107 hectares of land for parks and large farmlands. The city government of Higashi-Matsushima, also in the prefecture, has devised plans for using 86 of its 165 hectares of lands, including as factory sites.

However, the city of Kamaishi, Iwate Prefecture, has formulated plans for only 15 percent of its post-disaster purchased land.

"Companies are reluctant to make inroads in depopulated areas," said a city government official.

Meanwhile, a town government official in Yamamoto, Miyagi Prefecture, said, "As the lands we purchased are scattered about, it is difficult to utilize them."

According to Satoru Masuda, professor of regional planning at the graduate school of Tohoku University, the main purpose of purchasing the properties was to urge residents to relocate inland or to higher areas. Since there are plots of land that are difficult to use, it can't be helped that utilization of them has yet to be decided in more than 40 percent of the instances, Masuda explained.

"There are areas where it is more desirable to keep plots of land vacant as they incur minimal maintenance costs, rather than working out unrealistic plans and spending a huge amount of taxpayers' money on them," he said.

Local evacuation plans at odds with Govt's

March 10, 2016

FIVE YEARS AFTER: Local Fukushima disaster evacuation plans ignore central government instructions

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201603100018>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Although the town of Namie is still evacuated five years after the Fukushima nuclear disaster, local officials are already at odds with the central government over evacuation plans for any similar crisis. In its draft emergency plan, the town in Fukushima Prefecture decrees that residents can flee in a future accident even if radiation levels are below those warranting evacuation as dictated by the central government.

The draft was drawn up based on the lesson the disaster-hit town learned from the chaos that erupted in the wake of the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in 2011.

Although local governments are legally entitled to issue an order independently, the central government is not happy about Namie's plan. Minami-Soma, the city adjacent to Namie, takes a similar approach in the evacuation plan it crafted in 2013.

The secretariat of the Nuclear Regulation Authority would not give a nod to the plans by Namie and Minami-Soma, saying such actions could compromise the evacuation of people facing imminent danger. "In the Fukushima accident, more damage was done partly because people who were not in need of evacuation raced to flee," said an official with the secretariat's Emergency Preparedness/ Response and Nuclear Security Division. "The central government's guidelines are designed to minimize radiation exposure risks."

All the roads around Namie, located to the northwest of the crippled plant, were clogged with vehicles desperately trying to flee, hampering evacuation. Shelters were so packed that they could not accommodate all who rushed to them.

Namie Mayor Tamotsu Baba said the town, with a population of 18,700, has a responsibility to ensure smooth evacuation of residents by issuing an order on its own, instead of adhering to the central government's guidelines formulated after the Fukushima accident.

"It is not easy to evacuate in an orderly fashion," said Baba. "A panic will very likely occur if an accident comparable to the Fukushima nuclear disaster takes place."

In the wake of the Fukushima disaster, the central government obliged 135 municipalities situated within a 30-kilometer radius of a nuclear facility to formulate evacuation plans under its new guidelines for responding to a nuclear disaster.

The guidelines call for the immediate evacuation of residents living within a 5-km radius of the site of a severe accident.

Residents within a 5- to 30-km zone, such as Namie and Minami-Soma, which are within 30 km of both the Fukushima No. 1 and No. 2 nuclear plants, are urged to stay indoors. They would be asked to evacuate within a few hours of radiation levels reaching 500 microsieverts an hour.

However, that is such a high radiation level that no municipalities more than 5 km from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant experienced in the 2011 crisis, according to the NRA's secretariat.

The guidelines also state that residents must evacuate within a week if radiation measuring 20 microsieverts an hour continues for at least 24 hours. These steps are recommended based on the idea that it would do more damage to the elderly to evacuate than to stay indoors. The guidelines are also aimed at preventing traffic gridlock so that residents living near a crippled facility can promptly flee to safety.

A serious situation could unfold again in Fukushima Prefecture if work to cool spent nuclear fuel rods were rendered impossible by a natural disaster or terror attack at the plants.

Before the Fukushima disaster, Namie was not asked by the central government to have an evacuation plan in place, just like the rest of the municipal governments beyond the 5-km range from a nuclear facility.

An evacuation order from either the central government or Tokyo Electric Power Co., which operates the embattled plant, failed to reach Namie due to the escalating chaos following the nuclear crisis in 2011. So the town government was forced to act alone to evacuate its residents.

Namie officials believe that even if people are only asked to flee within a week after a reading of radiation hit 20 microsieverts an hour under the new guidelines, some will choose anyway to evacuate immediately. The officials said they would rather ensure smooth evacuation of local residents by acting independently of the central government.

In the case of Minami-Soma, residents were ordered to stay indoors due to the risk of radiation exposure at the time of the Fukushima accident.

But 55,000 of a total of 70,000 people evacuated voluntarily in the face of the scarcity of food in the city after the distribution network was jeopardized.

The NRA secretariat acknowledges that it will have to address the issue of how to distribute food and other relief aid to areas where people are asked to remain indoors as radiation levels rise.

Of the 135 municipalities, only 95 cities, towns and villages came up with evacuation plans.

But some in the prefectures of Ibaraki and Shizuoka are still void of their response measures since they have been unable to find shelters to accommodate all of the would-be evacuees.

The overall population in the 30-km zone in the two prefectures is nearly 1 million each, making the task formidable.

"The central government's guidelines are simply a desk theory," said a local government official in Ibaraki Prefecture. "The harder you work on your evacuation plan, the more unrealistic it gets."

(This article was written by Shinichi Sekine and Tomoya Ishikawa.)

Logproduction for Shiitake farming still quasi inexistent

March 9, 2016

FIVE YEARS AFTER: Radioactive forests prevent logging revival in Fukushima

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201603090060>

By YOSUKE FUKUDOME/ Staff Writer

TAMURA, Fukushima Prefecture--The once-thriving industry of log production for shiitake mushroom farming remains virtually nonexistent in Fukushima Prefecture after the 2011 nuclear disaster contaminated extensive mountain areas.

A year before the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant on March 11, 2011, the prefecture produced logs for cultivating shiitake totaling 47,800 cubic meters, the third largest volume among Japanese prefectures.

But radioactive fallout from the nuclear accident meant that shiitake log production in the prefecture dwindled to about 1 percent of the pre-disaster level in 2014, which is having a serious impact on local industry.

In the Miyakoji district of Tamura, located about 20 kilometers inland from the crippled nuclear power plant, the lumber industry shipped around 200,000 logs annually before the 2011 disaster.

“More than 80 percent of this area’s land is covered by forests, and we cannot think of any other business opportunities that don’t involve forestry,” said Shoichi Yoshida, a 60-year-old executive of the Fukushima Central Forestry Association.

While the evacuation order covering an eastern strip of the district was lifted in 2014, radioactive levels of trees in the district remain above target levels, and the resumption of shipments is still nowhere in sight. However, local forestry workers still routinely cut down oak and other trees, which are more than 20 years old, to maintain the mountain area’s capability of producing quality logs.

Iitate after 5 years



The road to the Nagadoro district remains barricaded in this photo taken in the Fukushima Prefecture village of Iitate. (Mainichi)

March 9, 2016

5 years after Fukushima meltdowns, off-limits zone in Iitate languishes

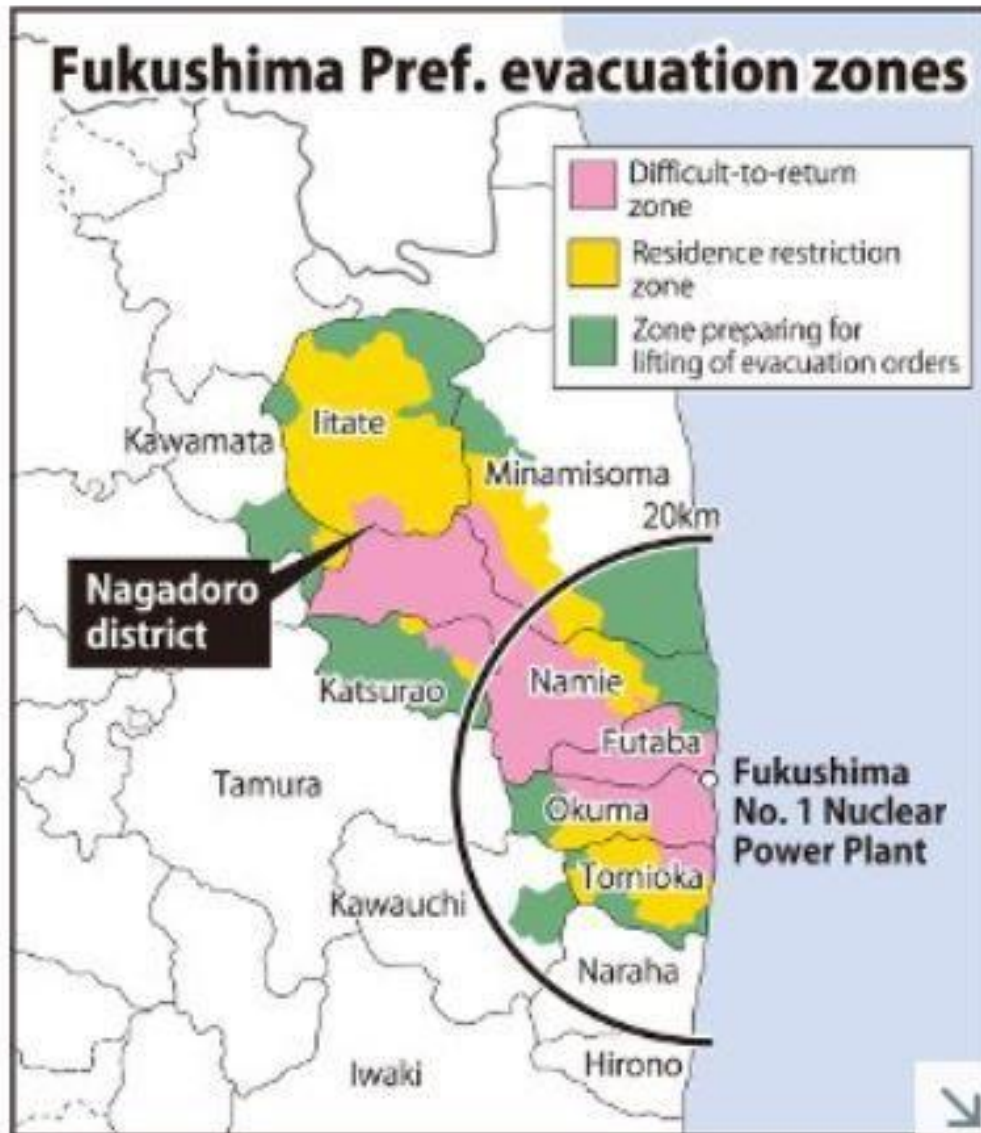
<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160309/p2a/00m/0na/021000c>

To date, the government has avoided providing any outlook for decontamination of areas designated as "difficult-to-return" zones in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster. And it has not given residents any idea of when they could return to those areas. But now, nearly five years after the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, officials are starting to consider the issue, and it is expected that guidelines will be presented from around this summer. Many evacuees have, however, already begun new lives in different parts of Japan, and it is feared that changing zone designations could drive a wedge between residents over whether to return home.

In the highland Abukuma region of eastern Fukushima Prefecture sit several settlements that have fallen silent. While most of the village of Iitate lies more than 30 kilometers away from the Fukushima No. 1 plant, the whole village was placed under an evacuation order because radioactive materials drifted northwest from the nuclear plant. In July 2012, when evacuated areas were re-designated, the Nagadoro district in the south of the village -- originally home to about 270 people -- was labeled a difficult-to-return zone, where radiation was not expected to fall below a government-set level for allowing residents to return even six years after the meltdowns. The district was the only one of 20 in the area to be barricaded off.

While decontamination proceeded in other areas in preparation for residents' return, the Nagadoro district languished. In December 2012, the Ministry of the Environment's Fukushima Office for Environmental Restoration held a briefing in the prefectural capital, and when a resident asked about decontamination of the Nagadoro district, the head of the office at the time responded, "We will conduct full-scale decontamination, though we can't say when." A year later, the ministry's guidelines for decontamination were revised, and the Nagadoro district was included as a place where decontamination was to be quickly considered. But under subsequent government policy, decontamination of difficult-to-return zones was limited to bases for town development -- and the Nagadoro district was left out.

In November 2014, three years and eight months after the outbreak of the disaster, Iitate Mayor Norio Kanno, who was aiming for a return of all residents, held a meeting with central government officials. At a briefing, a resident of the Nagadoro district stated, "If everyone wants it, then we could change the designation from a difficult-to-return zone to a residence restriction zone (with a lower level of radiation), and decontamination work could go ahead." But participants failed to reach agreement. Yoshitomo Shigihara, chief of the Nagadoro district, expressed firm resistance, saying, "Why do we have to bow our heads to the government at this stage?"



A survey conducted by the Reconstruction Agency in fiscal 2014 found that 29.4 percent of Iitate residents wanted to return to the village, while 26.5 percent had decided not to. Restricted to the Nagadoro district, however, just 13 percent of residents said they wanted to return, while 50.7 percent said they would not go back. With no clear outlook from the government, 60 percent of residents are said to have moved into new places outside the village.

One 66-year-old living in an apartment rented for Iitate villagers in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Date commented, "We have no option but to decide to buy land in the places to which we've evacuated and live there." At the same, he expressed concern about fading ties to other villagers.

"If I shift my address, then I'll no longer be a resident of Iitate. Up until now residents have somehow managed to stay connected, but we'll all be split up," he reflected.

Some residents worry that if the Nagadoro district is delisted as a difficult-to-return zone and the evacuation order over the village is lifted, then it will no longer be eligible for the special measures afforded to such areas. Compensation for psychological damage to residents of the district has already been paid in a lump sum, and building sites and structures are regarded as write-offs, so even if the current designation is lifted, the amount of compensation is unlikely to change. Still, the government

provides additional measures, such as medical fee exemptions, and in other areas where evacuation orders have already been lifted, the government has cut off support to households earning over a certain amount.

Kioku no Keisho [the Amazon archive]

March 11, 2016

FIVE YEARS AFTER: Amazon marks 3/11 anniversary with digital media archive

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/business/AJ201603110037>

By MARI FUJISAKI/ Staff Writer

Internet retail giant Amazon Japan KK published a web archive on March 10 documenting the 3/11 disaster and its aftermath in visual, audio and written digital media.

The website, called “Kioku no Keisho” (the remembrance project), was launched to mark the fifth anniversary of the 2011 East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

The archive--part of Amazon’s online bookstore--currently contains three audio recordings of people talking about their experiences around the disaster, and six Kindle e-books including photography documenting the events.

One audio file includes a recital of part of “16-sai no Kataribe,” (16-year-old storytellers), a book about three high school students that experienced the disaster at the age of 11, and the five years of their lives since.

The file also includes an interview with the book’s editor, Toshiro Sato, a former junior high school teacher.

Sato lost his second daughter in the tsunami at Okawa Elementary School in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, where 84 pupils and teachers were killed.

Amazon will be expanding the archive collection in future. The contents are available for free download for the time being at <http://www.amazon.co.jp/kioku>

3/11 victims remembered

March 11, 2016

FIVE YEARS AFTER: 3/11 victims remembered in ceremonies across Japan

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201603110058>

By TOMOYA ISHIKAWA/ Staff Writer

Five years to the day of the catastrophic Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, ceremonies were held throughout Japan on March 11 to remember the victims.

Survivors, including those forced to evacuate after the subsequent Fukushima nuclear disaster, attended services at locations throughout Japan because many are still unable to return to their wrecked hometowns.

Although the government had designated the period ending in March this year as one for concentrated rebuilding from the disasters, many hard-hit municipalities have a long way to go before they return to any semblance of the past.

Only about half of the government-funded rental housing units for disaster victims have been completed in the three hardest-hit prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima.

That may be one reason why more than 174,000 residents still live as evacuees five years on. Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures account for about 70 percent of the evacuees.

Perhaps one positive is that the number of evacuees has decreased to about a third of the 470,000 or so left homeless, or forced to leave home, immediately after the disasters.

STATISTICS

Statistics relating to the disasters were released by the National Police Agency on March 10.

A total of 15,894 people died and 2,561 are still reported as missing.

As of the end of September 2015, a total of 3,407 people have died due to a deterioration of health, suicide or other reasons related to the disasters--a figure compiled by the Reconstruction Agency.

An NPA report as of the end of 2015 found 202 evacuees from Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures died alone in temporary housing.

LACK OF HOUSING

About 54,000 households in the three prefectures continue to reside in temporary housing. The prefectures have plans to construct a total of 29,573 rental units for disaster victims, but so far only 14,042 have been completed, or 47.5 percent of the planned total.

A lack of construction workers is the main reason for the delay.

Other areas of construction have progressed much faster. More than 90 percent of roads and river levees have been restored to their former state.

Seventy-four percent of the farmland inundated by the tsunami five years ago has also been restored. The volume of the catch brought into major fishing ports has also returned to about 90 percent of the predisaster level. However, only 24 percent of seafood processing companies--a major local industry--have seen sales return to predisaster levels.

About 70,000 residents of Fukushima Prefecture continue to live as evacuees because they resided in areas where evacuation orders were issued due to the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

While such evacuation orders have been lifted for Tamura, Naraha and part of Kawauchi, not all residents who lived in the areas covered by those orders have returned home. The ratio of those who have returned is 69 percent for Tamura, 20 percent for Kawauchi and only 6 percent for Naraha.

Japan marks fifth anniversary of devastating 3/11 disasters

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/11/national/japan-marks-fifth-anniversary-of-devastating-311-disasters/#.VuK7VOaDmot>

by Reiji Yoshida

Staff Writer

At 2:46 p.m. Friday, millions of people observed a moment of silence across Japan as the country marked the fifth anniversary of the March 2011 quake and tsunami that devastated coastal areas of the Tohoku region, killing at least 19,304 and leaving an additional 2,561 still unaccounted for as of Thursday.

The anniversary comes as about 174,000 evacuees from disaster-hit areas are still living outside their damaged hometowns.

They include more than 43,000 from Fukushima, most of whom are believed to have fled the radioactive fallout from Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, which was wrecked by the killer tsunami.

On Friday, a memorial ceremony organized by the government and held in Tokyo was attended by Emperor Akihito, Empress Michiko and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, as well as three representatives of survivors from Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures, the three main areas devastated in the disasters. Likewise in many places throughout Tohoku, memorial ceremonies were held with a moment of silence observed at 2:46 p.m., the moment when the magnitude-9.0 quake rocked the region, triggering the gigantic tsunami that struck five years ago.

"On this day five years ago, I was a senior high school student and, as was our daily custom, my grandfather saw me off at the front door and my father drove me to the train station," Hisato Yamamoto, 22, a representative from Iwate Prefecture, said in a speech at the ceremony in Tokyo.

"The body of my grandfather was found a few days later. ... My beloved father has never come home to us," she said.

Her father, Sachio Yamamoto, was a firefighter. He went missing after rushing to close a coastal barrier floodgate to save the town of Miyako, Iwate Prefecture.

"I have pressed my mother for an explanation why he had to go," she said.

"But today, I am proud of him and respect him for trying to protect people's lives as a member of the town's firefighting unit," she said.

In his address, Emperor Akihito said progress has been made over the last five years, but many people continue to live under difficult conditions, both in the disaster-hit areas and the places they have evacuated to.

"It is important that everyone's hearts continue to be with the afflicted, so that each and every person in difficulty, without exception, will be able to get back their normal lives as soon as possible," he said.

In a paper released Thursday, the central government said that the "restoration of social infrastructure had been largely finished."

According to the government, local residents have finished or are in the process of rebuilding 130,000 houses by themselves. In addition, another 9,000 structures have been built to move coastal communities to higher ground to avoid another tsunami, with 17,000 more public housing units constructed for disaster survivors.

At a news conference Thursday, Abe argued that the Tohoku region is continuing to "make steady progress" toward recovery.

“Now more than 70 percent of (disaster-hit) agricultural land has become ready for planting, and nearly 90 percent of fishery-product processing facilities have resumed operations,” Abe boasted at the news conference.

“Seeds of new industries are now evolving one after another in disaster-hit areas,” he added.

Many local residents and workers, however, continue to struggle.

Despite Abe’s words of praise for the recovery, just 48 percent of fishery-product processing plants in Aomori, Iwate, Miyagi, Fukushima and Ibaraki prefectures have seen sales recover to 80 percent or more of their pre-disaster levels, according to a survey conducted by the Fisheries Agency from November through January.

In many Tohoku cities and towns, the fishing industry is considered one of few indigenous sectors that could support local economies once the central government begins to cut its massive spending on reconstruction work in the region.

Disaster-hit coastal communities are also facing a graying and shrinking population, which will make it even more difficult for local towns to recover from the lingering effects of 3/11.

According to a poll conducted by the daily Mainichi Shimbun newspaper, 16 of 42 mayors of cities and towns in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures said they expect the populations of their municipalities will dwindle more than 10 percent over the next decade.

Meanwhile, at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 plant, problems remain far from solved.

Tepco said it will take another 30 to 40 years to finish work to decommission the heavily damaged reactors, given the deadly levels of radiation still emanating from melted nuclear fuel somewhere within the reactor buildings.

Another big headache is the growing number, currently at about 1,000, of massive tanks that have been set up within the plant compound to hold some 800,000 tons of contaminated water.

Tepco has already processed about 600,000 tons with its Advanced Liquid Processing System (ALPS), which is capable of removing 62 kinds of radioactive material from tainted water. But the machine is unable to remove radioactive tritium, the reason Tepco must continue building an ever-rising number of tanks to hold the tainted water at the Fukushima plant.

Meanwhile, the Abe administration is now gearing up to reactivate more of the nation’s 42 commercial reactors that remain shut down in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear crisis. Of the 44 total reactors, two in Satsumasendai, Kagoshima Prefecture, have already been reactivated despite protests by anti-nuclear activists.

Utilities are applying for safety checks by the Nuclear Regulation Authority to reactivate another 22 reactors nationwide.

“Nuclear power is indispensable for our country, which has few natural resources, to secure stable energy supplies while addressing climate change issues,” Abe said at Thursday’s news conference.

He also claimed that a set of new safety standards introduced after the Fukushima disaster “are the strictest in the world” and that his government would promote the reactivation of reactors once they pass the screening by the NRA.

Families of dead and missing in 2011 disasters gather for memorials

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160311/p2a/00m/0na/024000c>

MINAMISANRIKU, Miyagi -- Five years after the deadly 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, a mourning ceremony for the victims was held here next to a monument to 119 locals who perished or remain unaccounted for.

Akio Miura, 76, is the father of Takeshi, then 51, an employee of the town's risk management department who vanished in the tsunami while he made tsunami warning announcements at the disaster prevention headquarters building. Miura wiped tears away while praying at the ceremony.

When graduating from junior high school, Takeshi had been advised to advance to a local prep school but instead opted to enroll in a marine-products vocational school, where he obtained radio certification. He then got his job at the town government.

When the March 11 tsunami struck, he took turns with his coworkers calling on the radio for evacuation of residents up until just before the tsunami hit.

"When I stopped hearing my son's voice on the radio, I thought he must have become a victim. He had a strong sense of responsibility," Miura says.

Unable to accept that his son was dead, Miura joined his wife Sueko, 80, in searching for him, but they never found his body. To comfort the spirit of his son, who he thought of as cold and in the water somewhere, he brought warming undergarments to Mount Osore in Aomori Prefecture, traditionally considered a place for dead souls.

"Not a day goes by that I don't think of him, my only son," Miura says.

Shinetsu Sato, 65, who lives in the Utatsu district of Minamisanriku, location of the monument, has not found his parents, Takeshi, and Itsuyo, who were aged 90 and 81 at the time of the disaster, respectively. Takeshi had been hospitalized at Shizugawa Hospital at the time, his asthma having worsened, and Itsuyo was staying there to watch over him. Located along the coast, the hospital was hit by tsunami exceeding 16 meters, and 74 people are thought to have died.

A nurse who survived testifies, "I told them to run, but Itsuyo held onto Takeshi's arm and wouldn't let go."

Three days later, a blanket with Takeshi's name was found in a window frame of the hospital, but his body never turned up. Four months later, Sato held a funeral for his parents. He says, "It was pitiful to not have the remains of either at the funeral, but I believe they are with each other. They liked hot springs, and I wonder if they are sitting in a hot spring in the afterworld."

3.11 disaster victims remembered

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160311_24/

A ceremony of remembrance has been held in Tokyo for the victims of the earthquake and tsunami that struck northeastern Japan on March 11th, 2011.

About 1,200 people attended the government-sponsored event on Friday, the 5th anniversary of the

disaster that also triggered the nuclear plant accident in Fukushima.

Emperor Akihito, Empress Michiko, and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe joined others in observing a moment of silence at 2:46 PM, the exact time the magnitude-9.0 earthquake struck.

Abe said in his speech that reconstruction of the disaster-hit regions is making steady progress. He said his government is determined to never allow the valuable lessons learned from the disaster to erode.

Abe pledged that the government will exert its unified efforts to build a strong and resilient nation that is resistant to disasters.

The Emperor said many people continue to live in difficult conditions to this day, both in the afflicted regions and in the places where they have evacuated to.

He said it is important that everyone's hearts continue to be with the afflicted, so that each person in difficulty -- without exception -- will be able to get back to their normal lives as soon as possible.

Representatives of victims' relatives from the hardest-hit prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima also spoke.

Kuniyuki Sakuma from Fukushima referred to the nuclear accident that forced many people from their homes.

He said his father passed away in a snowy, cold region far from his hometown after spending a long time as a refugee.

Sakuma said it is vital that the disaster never be forgotten. He called on families to continue passing on their experiences to future generations and across the world.

Still hunting for victims of disaster

March 11, 2016

Hunt for missing disaster victims still confounds rescuers

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/11/national/hunt-missing-disaster-victims-still-confounds-rescuers/#.VuK_quaDmov

Kyodo

Five years after the Great East Japan Earthquake, police in Fukushima, Miyagi and Iwate prefectures are still searching for and identifying the bodies of those who went missing on March 11, 2011, though as time goes on they have fewer clues to work with.

The huge earthquake and ensuing tsunami caused massive damage across a broad swath of the Tohoku region. It left a total of 15,894 people dead, while 2,562 people remain unaccounted for as of Feb. 10, including 1,124 in Iwate, 1,237 in Miyagi and 197 in Fukushima, according to the National Police Agency. Authorities in the three prefectures say they had recovered the bodies of 4,672 in Iwate, 9,539 in Miyagi and 1,613 in Fukushima by the end of January. The figures exclude the number of headless bodies, remains with only parts of the body recovered, as well as victims of aftershocks from the March 11 quake. Of those recovered, police have matched names with all of the bodies recovered in Fukushima, 4,613 of those in Iwate and 9,523 in Miyagi.

But the challenge of identifying victims has grown over time. This year, police have managed to identify just 10 people. The low figure could be attributed to several factors, including relatives not reporting their kin as missing as well as a lack of DNA samples to match with bodies, since many victims' homes were washed away in the tsunami.

In Fukushima Prefecture, a number of areas are still designated as no-go zones due to high radiation levels caused by the reactor meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. In these areas, police have found many businesses reluctant to aid in search activities, which often require the use of heavy machinery.

There are also many family members who argue the authorities have yet to exhaust all options in their search.

A man in Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture, whose eldest son is still listed as missing, submitted a request to the city office earlier this month calling for another investigation into places where searches were already conducted.

Despite these difficulties, police say they will continue working to identify remains.

In January, Fukushima police managed to ID the 1,613th victim, a carpenter in his 60s, based on records of artificial teeth. His body was recovered on March 14, 2011, but it took until January of this year to identify it as that of the carpenter, who had lived in the city of Iwaki.

After interviewing local dental technicians, police concluded that, due to their shape and color, it was highly likely that the carpenter's artificial teeth matched the dental records.

Police also obtained an X-ray from a hospital the man visited, which provided conclusive evidence. It showed "a feature on the backbone typical of those who regularly carry heavy objects over long periods of time."

Miyagi Prefectural Police set up a task force in November 2011 dedicated to researching and investigating unidentified and missing individuals. The officers from the task force have since taken various unorthodox approaches to their mission, including zooming in on pictures of remains and looking for moles or signs of surgery that might have been overlooked in an autopsy.

In the city of Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, a photo found near a male body was even helpful in identifying that man. Fingerprints found on the photo and that of the individual matched, and police went on to determine which photo-developing machine was used to print it, based on a code found on its back side. After going from that photo studio to another equipped with the same machine, police officers found the studio that actually developed the photo, which led to the identification of the 43-year-old man.

"Methods leading to identification are different in each case," an officer with the task force said. "We are determined to make continuous efforts to find clues step by step."

In addition to checking DNA samples and dental charts against the remains, Iwate Prefectural Police have released facial sketches of those who are still unidentified and held consultation events at temporary housing facilities.

Five years since the disaster, police in the coastal areas — who play a central role in search efforts — are renewing their pledge to recover the remains and return them to families in a bid to help bring closure to those still suffering.

Tomonori Hirobata, a 29-year-old senior officer at the Kahoku Police Station in coastal Ishinomaki, has taken part in the more than 1,000 searches since the disasters, when he was dispatched from the Naruko Police Station, in the inland city of Osaki.

Hirobata said he has had many exchanges with the locals at the police station and sometimes receives words of appreciation from them.

“There are still so many missing individuals who should be returned to their families, but my efforts are not enough,” Hirobata said apologetically.

Hirobata said he has seen many families of the missing and dead shed tears over the loss of their relatives, which has renewed his determination to help bring them closure.

“Who else would conduct the search but us?” he asked.

Grief



Tsutoshi Yoshida (left) and his wife, Seiko, offers prayers Friday at a site in the town of Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, where a post office used to stand. They lost their daughter Miki, who worked at the post office, in the 2011 tsunami. | KYODO

March 11, 2016

Grief still raw five years after Japan's quake, tsunami disaster

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/11/national/grief-still-raw-five-years-japans-quake-tsunami-disaster/#.VuK-6-aDmov>

Kyodo

SENDAI/MORIOKA, IWATE PREF. – As the sun rose Friday on areas of northeastern Japan still struggling from the devastating earthquake and tsunami that hit on March 11, 2011, people gathered to remember their lost loved ones and reflect on their grief five years after the disaster.

The magnitude-9 quake, ensuing tsunami and aftermath left 19,304 people dead and 2,561 missing and presumed dead, according to the National Police Agency's latest figures as of Thursday.

In the Arahama area of Sendai, concrete slabs are all that remain of the homes that once stood along the seaside.

Among those laying flowers at a cenotaph in Arahama was Toshihiko Daigaku, 61, who lost his wife, parents, elder brother and a nephew to the tsunami.

"I'm still getting by thanks to my ties with other people and the children," Daigaku said, having prayed for his lost relatives' souls to be at rest.

Not far up the coast in the city of Higashimatsushima, 43-year-old Yukie Sawaguchi made a promise to her late elder sister: "I'll live on your behalf."

Visiting the grave shared by her sister and three other relatives before heading to her job as a nursing care worker, Sawaguchi said she still regrets not calling the family before the tsunami arrived and telling them to flee.

"My feelings of regret and frustration have grown stronger with the passing of time," she said.

The tsunami took more than 600 lives in Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, where people were subsequently ordered to evacuate in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s No. 1 plant.

About 20 elderly evacuees still living in temporary housing offered silent prayers Friday as they stood at a spot overlooking the sea.

Ayako Matsumoto, 71, came to the site to tell her four relatives lost in the disaster not to worry about her. "Five years might seem like a long time, but it's gone by in an instant," Matsumoto said.

Sirens rang out at 6 a.m. in Miyako, Iwate Prefecture, where March 11 each year is marked by an evacuation drill to keep residents conscious of the potential for another disaster. More than 100 people hastened to a local school gymnasium designated as an evacuation center.

Having received a blanket for warmth in the gym, Koko Furudate, 68, remembered the bracing cold of five years ago.

"At that time we had no heating and had to huddle against each other to keep warm," she said.

People gathered at the steel frame of a local government building in Minamisanriku, Miyagi Prefecture, to remember the 43 people who lost their lives there.

"Although I know I have to accept reality, these five years have been tough," 64-year-old Ryuji Kawahara, from Yokohama, said through tears at the site. The body of his cousin, who worked at the office, has never been found.

On land and at sea, police teams continued to search Friday for the remains of thousands of missing people.

In the city of Ishinomaki in Miyagi Prefecture, a line of 60 police officers and volunteers carefully picked through the ground with hoes, wrapping up their search of an area around a river mouth.

"It's disappointing that we haven't found anything linked to missing victims here, but none of us will forget the disaster," local police chief Junichi Itabashi said.

Ahead of another day of radioactive decontamination work in Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, where residents are still not allowed to return to their homes, roughly 700 workers observed a moment of silence.

"We're doing all we can so evacuees can come back, but we still don't know when that day will come," a 59-year-old worker said.

Fukushima fishermen still worry

March 11, 2016

Catch limits, safety worries take toll on Fukushima fishery

<http://features.japantimes.co.jp/march-11-radiation/#part3>

KAZUAKI NAGATA

Staff writer

IWAKI, FUKUSHIMA PREF. — Over the past five years, fishermen in the disaster-struck regions of Miyagi and Iwate prefectures have revived their industry, steadily increasing the catch and shipment of oysters, seaweed and other local specialties.

But for the fishing industry in Fukushima Prefecture, the turnaround has been slow, and plagued by the impact of the nuclear disaster that caused massive amounts of radioactive water to flow to the Pacific Ocean.

"I think we are making some progress. The fishermen couldn't fish for more than a year (after 3/11)," said Yoshihisa Komatsu, deputy director of administration at the Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations. But the speed of the progress "is slow, as it's been already five years," he said.

Recovery for Fukushima's fishing industry has come in small steps. After March 11, 2011, fishermen voluntarily stopped fishing. They resumed in June 2012, although only on a trial basis, and the government slapped an outright ban on the sale of certain species deemed likely to be radioactive. The blacklist affected more than 35 types of fish caught off the Fukushima coast, which was famous for flounder, angler fish and rockfish.

Under the trial, fishing boats were allowed to catch a small amount of other species but were required to check their radiation levels. If the fish were found to be uncontaminated, they were shipped off to market. The goal is to see the reaction of consumers, who have largely avoided eating fish from the prefecture due to radiation worries.

The catch has significantly gone down in Fukushima, with only about 5,600 tons of fish caught in 2015, down from about 38,600 tons before 3/11.

To increase the catch, Komatsu said it was essential to lift the shipping ban.

"We can make the first step (toward full recovery) once the ban is lifted from all fish," said Komatsu.

While the sales ban on several species has been lifted, 28 kinds of fish remain on the list.

Trial fishing, meanwhile, has been expanded from three species to 72.

In addition, radiation-contaminated fish have drastically decreased.

According to the prefecture, about 50 percent of the fish samples tested for radiation levels exceeded the government-designated maximum of 100 becquerels per kilogram right after the nuclear disaster started in 2011. But after April 2015, no fish has exceeded that limit.

As a result, the Fukushima fisheries cooperative federation is now looking to expand the permissible fishing area closer to the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

Currently, fishermen can only fish outside of a 20-km radius of the plant. They want to expand this to a 10-km radius after Tokyo Electric Power Co. last October completed a sea wall that blocks contaminated groundwater from reaching the Pacific. Since then, the level of contamination near the plant has decreased.

While many take this as a positive sign toward recovery, concerns remain.

“If some fish show high levels of contamination, it could hurt efforts to fight the harmful rumors” about the safety of products from the area, Komatsu said.

Fukushima has suffered from a tainted image due to the Fukushima nuclear plant calamity, affecting everything from farm to marine products — something the prefecture has constantly been fighting.

“The harmful rumors need to end to some degree before the trial fishing ends and full-scale fishing resumes,” said Hiromitsu Endo, who represents distributor in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture.

Currently, his association of 28 distributors sell fish caught under the trial to the market.

But once fishing returns to full scale, the association will be disbanded, with each firm left on their own to sell their catch to customers. If the bad image remains, they fear they will have a hard time.

“It will be too late to start fighting the harmful rumors then,” Endo said.

Even five years after the disaster started, the harmful rumors persist, he said.

Although Fukushima Prefecture monitors radiation levels of fish, shipping only products that are not contaminated, distributors said some stores were reluctant to market the products because they didn’t sell well.

To wipe out the bad image, Komatsu of Fukushima fisheries cooperative said the industry needed to keep proving through trial fishing that the fish being sold was safe.

“The harmful rumors need to end to some degree before the trial fishing ends and full-scale fishing resumes.”

Mainichi video: Morning in a disaster area

The morning in a disaster area 5 years ago

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160311/p2a/00m/0na/026000c>

_ On March 11, 2016, the fifth anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, some 2,561 people were still listed as missing in the disasters.

According to the National Police Agency, more than 650,000 people have participated in searches for the missing over the last five years, but fewer remains are being recovered the more time passes since the disasters. In the six months up to the end of February this year, the identities of only four victims have been confirmed.

Population drop



The Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant is pictured from a Mainichi Shimbun aircraft on March 10, 2016. (Mainichi)

March 11, 2016

Fukushima population falls by 110,000 after nuclear disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160311/p2a/00m/0na/006000c>

The population of Fukushima Prefecture has dropped by more than 110,000 from before the nuclear disaster, it has been learned.

According to the Reconstruction Agency, about 43,000 Fukushima Prefecture residents are living outside the prefecture as evacuees from the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster, while around 55,000 remain within the prefecture as evacuees.

The 2015 Population Census (preliminary figures) found that the population of Fukushima Prefecture dropped by 115,458 -- or 5.7 percent -- from that in the previous survey in 2010.

In the wake of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant meltdowns in March 2011, the government issued evacuation orders to 11 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture. Among them, evacuation orders were lifted in part of the city of Tamura and the village of Kawauchi in April and October 2014, respectively. In September last year, the evacuation order was lifted in Naraha, making the town the first municipality to have its evacuation order removed among municipalities where all residents were ordered evacuated. However, only 6 percent of residents have returned to the town.

The government is planning to lift evacuation orders in the remaining areas by March 2017, except for the "difficult-to-return" zone where radiation levels remain high.

Would you buy food from Fukushima?

March 11, 2016

Fukushima food products still shunned by 15 percent of consumers: survey

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160311/p2a/00m/0na/021000c>

March 11, 2016 (Mainichi Japan)

Japanese version

Over 15 percent of people still hesitate to buy food produced in Fukushima Prefecture out of concerns over radiation materials emanating from the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster, a survey released by the Consumer Affairs Agency on March 10 has shown.

According to the survey conducted in February this year, 15.7 percent of consumers said they hesitate to purchase food items produced in Fukushima Prefecture for fear of radioactive substances, down 1.5 percentage points from a previous survey in August last year. While the figure was on a downward trend, the survey found more than 10 percent of consumers were still shying away from Fukushima-produced food items.

The Fukushima Prefectural Government conducted a total of 22,514 radiation monitoring tests on 490 items produced in the agricultural, forestry and fisheries sectors within the prefecture between April 2015 and February 2016. Of them, radiation doses were below the standard levels in 22,496 tests -- or 99.9 percent of all screenings.

The Consumer Affairs Agency's survey was conducted over the Internet covering residents in Tokyo and 10 other prefectures in and outside disaster-hit regions, including main consumers of items produced in the disaster-affected areas. Of them, 5,176 people responded to the survey.

According to past surveys, 19.4 percent of respondents hesitated to purchase food produced in Fukushima Prefecture in the first survey conducted in February 2013. While the figure had since been on the decline, it shot up to a record 19.6 percent in the August 2014 survey after controversy arose over a manga depicting the protagonist who had a bleeding nose after visiting the stricken nuclear plant. The figure had since decreased again.

"There are people who say they do not eat food (from Fukushima) without being aware of the situation well, but just because they feel uneasy. We have no choice but to continue dispatching information patiently," said a representative of the Consumer Affairs Agency.

Temporary must not last too long

March 11, 2016

Prolonged stay in temporary housing hurts health of disaster evacuees

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160311/p2a/00m/0na/022000c>

Japanese version

The prolonged stay in temporary prefabricated housing structures of evacuees from the Great East Japan Earthquake is taking a toll on their health, with an increasing number of residents requiring nursing care or other support.

On Nov. 1 last year, at one temporary housing community situated on the playground of Shizugawa Elementary School in Minamisanriku, Miyagi Prefecture, residents noticed that the lights in the housing unit of the 69-year-old head of the neighborhood association were still on late into the night. Concerned, they reported the situation. The man was later found inside, dead in his bathroom.

This man had, shortly after the disaster, been one of the evacuees taking refuge at a town gymnasium. As up to around 1,500 evacuees gathered there, he took on the role of head of the shelter's "neighborhood association." Faithfully performing the duties asked of him, he was trusted by the other evacuees. When he moved into temporary housing two months later, he kept his position as head of the neighborhood association, busily working at distributing fliers and gathering people for events.

However, the man rarely showed up at the community's social events, and multiple residents witnessed him drinking hard liquor at his home from the morning hours.

"Dying at (what was supposed to be) a temporary home ... Five years is a long time," says the man's 72-year-old brother, who lives at a different temporary housing community.

Since 2012, the Miyagi Prefectural Government has been checking on the health of evacuees in temporary housing every year. In the latest survey, conducted from September through November last year, in which it received responses from 3,842 households, 19.8 percent of respondents said their health was "not very good" or "very bad," the highest percentage to say so in the prefecture's surveys in the past four years. Additionally, 7.5 percent of the people in the survey were recognized as strongly tending toward anxiety or depression, higher than the national average of 4.4 percent as found by a 2013 nationwide survey using the same method.

Prolonged living in temporary housing is especially hard on the elderly. At Daiichi Junior High School in Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture, which hosts over 100 temporary residences, an 80-year-old man collapsed on the morning of Dec. 7 last year while trying to board a bus to take him to nursing care. It happened just after he had been holed up in his small housing unit for a few days with a cold. His 78-year-old wife says, "It seems that his blood circulation worsened because he hadn't been moving much."

At the time when the disaster struck, the man had been diagnosed as needing a moderate level of nursing care, but he was capable of walking. After moving into temporary housing, he got outside less often, and the housing unit he and his wife lived in was only around 30 square meters in area and could become very cold. The man's health worsened, and from October last year he began needing a greater degree of nursing care. He started going as an outpatient nearly every day to receive these services. He lived through his collapse, but in late February this year he moved into a nursing home and is now nearly bedridden.

"If it weren't for the earthquake disaster, he probably wouldn't have gotten this bad," his wife laments.

As of October last year, 18.9 percent of Rikuzentakata's population of those aged 65 and older was certified as needing care or support, an increase of 3 percentage points over the course of five years and more than the national average of 18.0 percent. The jump in certifications nationwide over the five years averaged 1.36 points, while for the disaster-hit prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima the average increase was 2.04 points.

The head of Rikuzentakata's long-living society division, says, "We don't have data to back this up, but with many elderly people living in small temporary housing units, the figures may be related to the fact that they are living in stressful environments."

Yasutake Tomata, instructor of public hygiene at Tohoku University, who has been conducting health surveys on elderly people in the disaster-hit areas, says, "The activity level of disaster survivors has clearly fallen during their prolonged stay in temporary housing. The change in (living) environment from the disaster is having an effect (on how they live)."

Children can be resilient

March 11, 2016

FIVE YEARS AFTER: Children adjust to new lives after hardships of 2011 tsunami disaster

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/quake_tsunami/AJ201603110042

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

A red school backpack is Futaba Omori's most treasured possession, which survived the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami along with its owner.

Futaba's elementary school in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, burned to the ground in the fires that broke out in the aftermath of the 9.0-magnitude quake and tsunami.

Her family's home was also flattened. All the little girl had known was in ruins.

When she and her mother returned to the ruins of their home after the disaster, they managed to retrieve one of Futaba's notebooks, some stationery and game software.

Sifting through the ashes of her school, an old friend and reminder of happier days was also discovered: her school backpack, which had miraculously survived unscathed.

When she graduated from the school, her classmates wrote messages of hope for Futaba on it. Her backpack is a symbol of the days before the disaster and her continuing friendships with her classmates. Futaba and her family had to stay in temporary housing for more than three years. But she began a new chapter in her life in late 2014 when her family finally moved into a newly constructed house. She has her own room there.

Now a first-year junior high school student, Futaba loves basketball.

Futaba is just one of hundreds of children who were forced to adapt to a difficult life after the disaster.

Many kids lost a mother or father or both when the tsunami claimed thousands of victims.

Sora Sasaki, 11, from Yamada, Iwate Prefecture, lost his mother, Kanako, who died in the disaster at age 33.

In August 2011, his home was visited by many of his mother's friends who stopped by to pay their respects to Kanako.

A photo taken in a room that summer shows Kanako's portrait and flowers and Sora lying with his eyes closed.

"I do not like to see my mom's picture because it saddens me," he said.

But he often talked about his mother, according to his 64-year-old grandmother, Estuko.

Five years after the loss of his mother, Sora loves playing outdoors and chases a soccer ball with his friends until dusk.

At home, he often jokes and makes Estuko laugh.

She said although he does not talk about his mother as often as he used to, he still misses her.
“He occasionally looks at her pictures in a photo album alone,” Etsuko says.
(This article was written by Shinichi Iizuka and Shingo Kuzutani.)

Fukushima: Changed forever

March 10, 2016

INTERVIEW/ Kazuya Tarukawa: Reality of Fukushima is unrecoverable, uncompensable

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/opinion/AJ201603100016>

By KAZUAKI HAGI/ Staff Writer

Kazuya Tarukawa, a farmer in Sukagawa, Fukushima Prefecture, found himself in the media spotlight after his father committed suicide in the early stages of the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

In a recent interview with The Asahi Shimbun, Tarukawa recounted how his gratifying life as a farmer drastically changed on March 11, 2011.

He also shared his thoughts on the compensation system, rumors about Fukushima products, and how Tokyo Electric Power Co. sent him a fax instead of a direct apology for his father's death.

Excerpts of the interview follow:

* * *

Question: What are things like five years after the disaster started?

Tarukawa: Radioactive materials fell on this central strip of Fukushima Prefecture, too. Rice paddies, farm fields and plastic greenhouses were all ruined, so our “workplaces” were contaminated. But Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the crippled nuclear plant, has not compensated us for lost assets or removed the radioactive substances.

Five years have passed, and that's it. We have only sustained damage and suffering. I keep asking myself, “Why do we have to go through all this?”

We did receive 80,000 yen (\$706) in the first year of the disaster and 40,000 yen in the second year for psychological suffering, but that was all. The thinking behind the payments was probably like, “Here's 120,000 yen, so keep your mouth shut and wait for the radiation levels to go down on their own.”

How can that make up for the damage we sustained?

Q: I have been told that your father was dedicated to organic farming of vegetables. Could you elaborate?

A: He cared a lot about the environment. He began growing winter cabbage because you never get worms, even without a single disinfection, in winter. The cabbage grows under the snow and develops quite a sweet taste. All local schools were using our cabbage in their school lunches.

He was so happy to be feeding children with something really safe and tasty. He was once invited by school officials to give a talk about food education. He was proud of things like that.

He hanged himself on the morning the day after the central government told him to stop shipping his vegetables. Around 7,500 pre-harvest cabbages were ruined. His farmland was contaminated. His heart was probably heavy while he was wondering how he would get on with his life.

Q: You reached a settlement in the case through the intermediary of the Nuclear Damage Compensation Dispute Resolution Center, whereby TEPCO acknowledged a causal relation with the disaster. Could you elaborate on that?

A: I took the case to the center because I wanted to avenge my father so he would not die in vain. I finally won the settlement and received damages. I thought that TEPCO people would finally come to my place to offer incense and apologize. But that never happened. I got a fax instead.

Q: How is the cleanup work going?

A: Our rice paddies were cleaned up. The ground was plowed to about 40 centimeters using a big tractor, sprinkled with zeolite and then plowed again. We were told that the zeolite will absorb radioactive substances in the soil, and that's the cleanup thing.

But it doesn't make sense. Rice may stop pulling up radioactive materials, but the absolute amount in the soil remains the same.

We are toiling every day from morning until evening on contaminated soil. We are filled with anxiety about what will become of us in the future, and whether we might suffer the impact someday.

When we were negotiating with the central government, I repeatedly asked farm ministry officials on the podium: "Do you know the first kanji in the Japanese word for 'cleanup?' (The kanji means "remove.") You are just stirring things up. How can that amount to a 'cleanup?'"

Everyone then cast their eyes low at their documents. They must have thought I was right.

Q: Isn't there a way to strip away the contaminated surface soil?

A: We would be luckier if only there was a way to strip it off in thin slices. But in the month after the disaster started, the prefectural government gave us directions, saying it was OK to plow the ground. I didn't quite believe in that stuff, but everybody did plow the ground.

We shouldn't have done the plowing thing back then. They could have told us to stop growing crops for a year, and you will be compensated for that. That was a big moment when the sides parted.

It's easy to strip off soil with a machine. But if you remove 40 cm of soil, you wouldn't get decent crops. It takes tens of years to make just 1 cm of fine, fluffy soil.

I stick to what I am doing because I don't want to let my rice paddies go to ruin during my time, the time of the eighth generation.

The paddies would quickly go to ruin if you didn't do anything about them and just let them lie around. That would also cause trouble with your neighbors. Come to think of it, if you didn't grow anything, you also wouldn't be getting compensation money, and you would be left without income. You couldn't maintain your living.

Q: What compensation are you getting for the farm products you grow?

A: We are only being compensated for crops with records of sale and proof that we suffered damage. For example, if you sold something at 2,000 yen before the disaster but now are making only 1,500 yen from it, TEPCO will compensate you for the difference.

But we have not been compensated for cucumbers for the past two years because their prices soared due to the unseasonable weather. People are saying stuff like, "We are not paying you because you are selling them at higher prices than you did before the disaster."

It's funny, huh? We would be making more money if it were not for the disaster. We are getting less than in other prefectures. You know, TEPCO is loath to shell out money.

And there are so many things that we have no way to seek damages for. Things that will never be with us again. We used to grow shiitake mushrooms at our homestead every year for consumption. Butterbur sprouts and Japanese angelica tree shoots from the mountains--they have all been spoiled. But we are getting nothing for that.

Q: What about the impact of negative publicity?

A: The 2011 harvest of rice from our paddies measured up to 30 becquerels or so in radioactive content. That was a safe enough level because the regulation standard was 500 becquerels (per kilogram; 100 becquerels from fiscal 2012) or less. But it's something that you are putting in your mouth, after all. Frankly, I didn't want to eat it myself. Well, I did eat it because I couldn't have gone shopping elsewhere. But I do have a sense of guilt about making shipments. So I know very well why Tokyoites don't feel like eating things from Fukushima. Who would want to buy stuff to eat from a place with such a stupid old nuclear plant?

It's not about "negative publicity." You suffer from "negative publicity" when your sales have dropped because groundless rumors have spread. But our case is not like that. Everything is well-grounded. The radioactive materials actually fell.

Q: Do they still continue to be detected?

A: No radioactive materials were detected in rice last year and the year before last. In fact, we have done everything we can. We are spraying potassium chloride, which suppresses the absorption of radioactive substances, every year.

All bags of rice are being screened, and when you get measurement figures, you are not allowed to ship them. I believe that rice from Fukushima is now much safer than rice from other prefectures.

And our rice is selling well, in fact, in the restaurant industry and in hospitals because you may never know that the product is from Fukushima Prefecture. You may not see a lot on the surface, but vast quantities are on the move. Because Fukushima rice tastes good. It's sticky and sweet. So restaurant industry people seem to be happy because they can buy tasty rice at cheap prices.

Q: What about vegetables?

A: Greenhouses were under plastic covers at the time of the disaster, so the soil in there was never contaminated. I decided to grow everything in greenhouses, so I have almost stopped growing things outdoors, including cabbage, because I don't want to see measurement figures in my crops again. I am now growing broccoli, but the prices are so cheap, beaten down. Urbanites don't bother to differentiate between broccoli grown in greenhouses and those grown in open fields as long as they are from Fukushima Prefecture.

Q: Nuclear reactors are being brought back online these days. Your thoughts?

A: Japan remained free of nuclear power for some time. But look, was there any part of Japan where everything was pitch-dark at night during that time? We certainly had enough electricity. We may have paid more for crude oil, and nuclear power may be cheaper in fuel costs. But think about it: How much do you have to pay to clean up after a disaster when one happens? It's really a burden. What would become of this country if another nuclear plant were to fail somewhere? You could raise taxes, but would that be the end of it?

Q: With whom do you want to share your feelings now?

A: I could be better off if I didn't raise my voice and kept silent. But I am somebody in the media spotlight because of my father. There are hosts of other farmers who feel like I do, that something is wrong. It's not in my power, after all, to hold my voice about such feelings. Doing that is dishonest.

That's why I decided to appear in the movie ("Daichi wo Uketsugu" (Taking over Mother Earth), a 2015 documentary directed by Junichi Inoue). I particularly want farmers in areas hosting nuclear plants to watch this film. I want them to know what will happen when there is a disaster. My father used to say: "Human-made things will certainly fail someday. Nothing can stand the forces of nature." And things have turned out exactly like that. And after five years, nobody has taken responsibility.

* * *

Born in 1975, Kazuya Tarukawa worked for a company in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, after graduating from a university. He returned to his family home in Sukagawa, 65 kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, 10 years ago to engage in farming.

Revisiting 3/11

In the Japan times today, a three-part report

<http://features.japantimes.co.jp/march-11-recovery/>

On March 11, 2011, at 2:46 p.m., a magnitude-9.0 earthquake shook the foundations of the Tohoku region, triggering a massive tsunami and nuclear meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. It was tragedy that transfixed the world and still reverberates through Japan. Five years later, we look back on a day that changed the nation, at lessons learned and at the obstacles that lie ahead.

Massive spending alone is not enough

March 10, 2016

The 3/11 disasters, five years on

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2016/03/10/editorials/311-disasters-five-years/#.VuK-I-aDmot>

Five years after the Great East Japan Earthquake and the massive tsunami hit the Tohoku coastline, reconstruction in the disaster-ravaged areas remains a mixed picture at best. The ¥25.5 trillion set aside by the government for the five-year "intensive reconstruction" period through the end of this month may have rebuilt public infrastructure and removed much of the tsunami debris. **But reconstruction of people's shattered lives can hardly be called steady five years on, particularly in Fukushima Prefecture, where the radiation fallout from the meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant keep municipalities in the vicinity still uninhabitable.**

Demographic trends in the affected areas — already gloomy before the disasters — paint an even grimmer picture of their future today. Reconstruction from the March 11, 2011, disasters must remain a national priority for years to come.

A Kyodo News survey of 300 people in Miyagi, Iwate and Fukushima prefectures — which suffered the most from the tsunami and nuclear disaster — in December showed that most respondents think the reconstruction effort has not made much progress over the past five years, with the ratio of such respondents the highest in Fukushima at 73 percent. Nearly half of the people polled said their household income remains below what it was before the disasters.

Symbolic of the slow progress is that as many as 59,000 people still live in “temporary” housing units for the evacuees — though roughly half the peak — in the three prefectures. **In comparison, all the temporary housing units established after the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake were vacated within five years.**

Development of new housing land on higher ground in the tsunami-ravaged communities and construction of public apartments for the displaced people are still 30 percent and 48 percent complete, respectively, as various problems, including a surge in the cost of building materials and a manpower shortage, delay the work. Many of the municipalities that run the temporary units say it will take at least several more years before they expect all the residents to find permanent homes. Others — many in Fukushima — say they have no idea when they can close the temporary housing.

Caring for the physical and mental health of long-term evacuees remains a serious challenge. In Fukushima Prefecture, more than 2,000 people have died in causes indirectly linked to the 2011 disasters — well over the 1,604 killed by the earthquake and tsunami.

According to the Reconstruction Agency, 174,471 people remain displaced from their homes due to the effects of the March 2011 disasters — down from the estimated 470,000 right after the tsunami — and live in the temporary houses, public and rented apartments, relatives and friends’ homes, and hospitals across Japan’s 47 prefectures. Many have given up returning to their hometowns. The 2015 national census shows that the population of Miyagi, Iwate and Fukushima declined 0.6 percent, 3.8 percent and 5.7 percent, respectively, from the previous census in 2010. The much steeper population declines in the coastal parts of the prefectures devastated by the tsunami and nuclear disaster underline the critical problems they face. **The population drain hinders the reconstruction of local communities and businesses, which in turn accelerates the exodus of people.**

The towns of Onagawa and Minamisanriku in Miyagi, among the most severely damaged municipalities, suffered a population loss of 37 percent and 29 percent, respectively, while Otsuchi, Iwate Prefecture, saw a 23 percent fall. The combined population of 15 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture affected by the tsunami and the Tepco plant disaster plunged by 80,000, or 13 percent. The population of the towns of Okuma, Futaba, Namie and Tomioka — all close to the Tepco plant — was listed as zero. Last year, the government revised its policy on reconstruction of the Fukushima areas hit by the nuclear disaster, and now plans to encourage the return of residents in areas where radiation has come down to relatively low levels by lifting the evacuation order and other restrictions there by March 2017. But the experience of Naraha, which mostly lies within 20 km of Fukushima No. 1, suggests that **the lifting of evacuation advisories alone will not return people’s life back to normal.**

The evacuation order for Naraha residents were lifted in September — the first among municipalities where all residents had evacuated. Six months later, only 407 residents of the town — or 6 percent of the total of 7,300 before the disaster — have resettled. Most of those resettled are elderly residents, while younger residents hesitate to return. The town’s elementary and junior high schools remain in Iwaki — where much of the evacuees from the town continue to live.

The decline in the number of schoolchildren also exacerbates the aging of the population in the disaster-affected areas. Kyodo News reported that elementary and junior high school students in the 42 municipalities in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures severely hit by the disasters numbered 186,000 in the current fiscal year, down 25,000 from 2010 for a 12.2 percent fall — far faster than the nationwide average of a 5.2 percent decline. Reconstruction of farmland and fishing facilities in the Tohoku coastal areas ravaged by the tsunami has made substantial progress. However, the demographic woes exacerbated by the 2011 disasters cloud the prospect of the agriculture and fisheries industries in the areas.

The government plans to spend a total of ¥32 trillion over the decade from 2020 for reconstruction from the 2011 disasters — a massive figure nearly double the ¥16.3 trillion for rebuilding from the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake. **The five years since March 2011 show that massive public spending alone will not rebuild people's lives.** The government needs to stop and think what else is needed in the coming years.

Not worth it...

March 14, 2016

Fukushima evacuations were not worth the money, study says

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/14/national/fukushima-evacuations-were-not-worth-the-money-study-says/#.VuaL4-aDmot>

by William Hollingworth

Kyodo

LONDON – The costs of evacuating residents from near the Fukushima No. 1 plant and the dislocation the people experienced were greater than their expected gain in longevity, a British study has found. The researchers found that at best evacuees could expect to live eight months longer, but that some might gain only one extra day of life. They said this does not warrant ripping people from their homes and communities.

The team of experts from four British universities developed a series of tests to examine the relocations after the Fukushima crisis and earlier Chernobyl disaster in 1986.

After a three-year study, the academics have concluded that Japan “overreacted” by relocating 160,000 residents of Fukushima Prefecture, even though radioactive material fell on more than 30,000 sq. km of territory.

“We judged that no one should have been relocated in Fukushima, and it could be argued this was a knee-jerk reaction,” said Philip Thomas, a professor of risk management at Bristol University. “It did more harm than good. An awful lot of disruption has been caused. However, this is with hindsight and we are not blaming the authorities.”

The team used a wide range of economic and actuarial data, as well as information from the United Nations and the Japanese government.

In one test, an assessment of judgment value, the researchers calculated how many days of life expectancy were saved by relocating residents away from areas affected by radiation.

They compared this with the cost of relocation and how much this expenditure would impact the quality of people's lives in the future.

From this information, they were able to work out the optimal or rational level of spending and make a judgment on the best measures to mitigate the effects of a nuclear accident.

Depending on how close people were to the radiation, the team calculated that the relocations added a period of between one day to 21 days to the evacuees' lives.

But when this was compared with the vast amounts of money spent, the academics came to the conclusion that it was unjustified in all cases.

In some areas, they calculated that 150 times more money was being spent than was judged rational.

Thomas adds, the tests do not take into account the physical and psychological effects of relocating, which have been shown to have led to more than 1,000 deaths among elderly evacuees.

Other studies have also found that once people have lived away for a certain period of time it can become increasingly difficult to persuade them to return.

After Chernobyl, the world's worst nuclear disaster, around 116,000 people were initially relocated away from the disaster zone.

Looking back on the incident, the team judged it was only worthwhile to relocate 31,000 people because they would have lost in excess of 8.7 months in life expectancy had they remained.

However, for the rest of the 116,000 people, it would have been a more rational decision to keep them where they were, given that their average loss of life was put at three months.

Four years later, a further 220,000 people were relocated from areas close to Chernobyl. Researchers found this unjustified.

Thomas says the loss in life expectancy following a nuclear accident has to be put into context alongside other threats all people face.

For example, it has been claimed that the average Londoner will lose about 4½ months in life expectancy due to high pollution levels.

Thomas concludes governments should carry out a more careful assessment before mounting a relocation operation of at least a year. A temporary evacuation could be a good idea while authorities work out the risk from radiation, he said.

In the future, Thomas would like to see more real-time information made available to the public on radiation levels in order to avoid hysteria and bad planning.

On a plus note, the team found that other remedial measures — decontaminating homes, deep ploughing of soil and bans on the sales of certain food products — were far more effective.

Thomas has already discussed his findings with colleagues at the University of Tokyo and he is keen that his findings can help better quantify the risks from radioactive leaks.

The project was sponsored by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, Britain's main agency for funding research in engineering and the physical sciences. **It was intended to give advice for nuclear planners both in Britain and India.**

The research team comprised specialists from City University in London, Manchester University, the Open University and Warwick University.

Compare with recent report :

Fukushima Report: 10,000 Excess Cancers Expected in Japan as a Result of 2011 Reactor Meltdowns, Ongoing Radiation Exposure

Report Gauges Cancer Prospects for Children, Rescue/Recovery Worker, and General Population; Japanese Government Criticized for “Disturbing” Failure to Examine Wider Radiation-Related Diseases

March 9, 2016

WASHINGTON, D.C. & BERLIN – March 9, 2016 – Residents of the Fukushima area and the rest of Japan will experience more than 10,000 excess cancers as a result of radiation exposure from the triple-reactor

meltdown that took place on March 11, 2011, according to a new report from Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) and International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW).

Titled *"5 Years Living With Fukushima"* and available online at www.psr.org/FukushimaReport2016, the PSR/IPPNW report laments that the full impact of Fukushima may never be known, due to Japan's failure to immediately and fully track radiation exposures, as well as a "disturbing" lack of testing of the general population for radiation-related diseases and other impacts (miscarriages, fetal malformations, leukemia, lymphomas, solid tumors or non-cancerous diseases). The massive initial radioactive emissions were not recorded at the time of the triple-reactor meltdown and some radioactive isotopes (including strontium-90) have not been measured at all.

The PSR/IPPNW report uses the best available science and data to gauge the excess cancer rates among children, rescue and clean-up workers, and the general population of Japan. In addition to the 200,000 Fukushima residents relocated nearby into makeshift camps, the exposed include millions of others in Japan as a result of fallout-contaminated food, soil and water. Fukushima is often incorrectly seen as a "past" event; the reality is that radioactive emissions from the wrecked reactors continue to this day both into the atmosphere and in the form of 300 tons of leakage each day into the Pacific Ocean.

Key findings of the PSR/IPPNW report include the following:

- **Children.** "116 children in Fukushima Prefecture have already been diagnosed with aggressive and fast-growing, or already metastasizing, thyroid cancer – in a population this size about one to five cases per year would normally be expected. For 16 of these children a screening effect can be excluded as their cancers developed within the last two years."
- **Workers.** "More than 25,000 cleanup and rescue workers received the highest radiation dose and risked their health, while preventing a deterioration of the situation at the power plant site. If data supplied by the operator TEPCO is to be believed, around 100 workers are expected to contract cancer due to excess radiation, and 50 percent of these will be fatal. The real dose levels, however, are most likely several times higher, as the operator has had no qualms in manipulating the data to avoid claims for damages – from hiring unregistered temporary employees to tampering with radiation dosimeters and even crude forgery."
- **The rest of Japan.** "The population in the rest of Japan is exposed to increased radiation doses from minor amounts of radioactive fallout, as well as contaminated food and water. Calculations of increased cancer cases overall in Japan range from 9,600 to 66,000 depending on the dose estimates."

Catherine Thomasson, MD, report co-editor, and executive director, Physicians for Social Responsibility, said: **"The health legacy of Fukushima will haunt Japan for years to come and it cannot be wished out of existence by cheerleaders for nuclear power. Unfortunately, the pro-nuclear Japanese government and the country's influential nuclear lobby are doing everything in their power to play down and conceal the effects of the disaster. The high numbers of thyroid cancers already verified with 50 additional waiting for surgery in the children of Fukushima prefecture is astounding. The aim seems to be to ensure the Fukushima file is closed as soon as possible and the Japanese public returns to a positive view of nuclear power. This rush to re-embrace nuclear power is dangerous to the extent that it sweeps major and very real medical concerns under the rug."**

Dr. Alex Rosen, pediatrician and vice-chair, International Physicians for Prevention of Nuclear War, said: **"One is of course reminded of the tobacco lobby disputing the notion that the horrific effects of its products have no adverse health impacts. This self-serving falsehood echoed for decades was made possible simply because the long-term health effects of smoking were not immediately observable. The 10,000 to 66,000 people who will develop cancer solely as a result of the**

"manmade disaster" are neither 'negligible' nor 'insufficient,' as Japanese authorities, the nation's nuclear lobby, and various industry-dominated international bodies, would have you believe."

Tim Mousseau, PhD, professor of Biological Sciences, University of South Carolina, said: **"It is unfortunate that, in some regards, we have better and more complete data about the impacts of Fukushima radiation on trees, plants and animals than we do on humans. We are seeing higher mortality rates, reduction in successful reproduction and significant deformities. A great deal of this research has been done to date and it has troubling implications. The research findings should be heeded to direct human studies, particularly regarding the question of genetic and transgenerational effects of radiation."**

Robert Alvarez, senior scholar specializing in nuclear disarmament, environmental, and energy policies, Institute for Public Studies, and former senior policy advisor, US Department of Energy, said:

"Radioactive fallout from the reactors has created de facto 'sacrifice zones' where human habitation will no longer be possible well into the future. In November 2011, the Japanese Science Ministry reported that long-lived radioactive cesium had contaminated 11,580 square miles (30,000 sq km) of the land surface of Japan. Some 4,500 square miles – an area almost the size of Connecticut – was found to have radiation levels that exceeded Japan's allowable exposure rate of 1 mSV(millisievert) per year. Fourteen of the nation's 54 reactors are permanently shut down as they are on fault lines and only four have been restarted."

The PSR/IPPNW report also cautions that Fukushima was far from a one-time radiation incident: "The wrecked reactors have been leaking radioactive discharge since March 2011, de-spite assurances by the nuclear industry and institutions of the nuclear lobby such as the International Atomic Energy Organi-zation that a singular incident occurred in spring 2011, which is now under control. This statement ignores the continu-ous emission of long-lived radionuclides such as cesium-137 or strontium-90 into the atmosphere, the groundwater and the ocean. It also ignores frequent recontamination of affected ar-eas due to storms, flooding, forest fires, pollination, precipitation and even clean-up operations, which cause radioactive isotopes to be whirled into the air and spread by the wind. Thus, sev-eral incidents of new contamination with cesium-137 and stron-tium-90 have been discovered during the past years, even at considerable distance beyond the evacuation zone."

The report also notes: "Finally, there are frequent leaks at the power plant itself – par-ticularly from the cracked underground vaults of the reactor buildings and from containers holding radioactive contaminated water, which were hastily welded together and already exhibit numerous defects.

According to TEPCO, 300 tons of radioactive wastewater still flow unchecked into the ocean every day – more than 500,000 tons since the beginning of the nuclear disaster. The amount and composition of radioactive isotopes fluctuate widely so that it is not possible to ascertain the actual effect this radioactive discharge will have on marine life. What is clear, however, is that increasing amounts of strontium-90 are being flushed into the sea. Strontium-90 is a radioactive isotope that is incorporated into living organisms in a similar way to calcium - in bones and teeth. As it travels up the marine food chain, it undergoes significant bioaccumulation and, because of its long biological and physical half-lives, will continue to contaminate the environment for the next hundreds of years."

ABOUT THE GROUPS

Physicians for Social Responsibility has been working for more than 50 years to create a healthy, just and peaceful world for both the present and future generations. PSR advocates on key issues of concern by addressing the dangers that threaten communities. www.psr.org.

International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War is a non-partisan federation of national medical groups in 64 countries, representing tens of thousands of doctors, medical students, other health

workers, and concerned citizens who share the common goal of creating a more peaceful and secure world freed from the threat of nuclear annihilation. www.ippnw.org

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EDITOR'S NOTE: A streaming audio replay of the news event is now available.

Polyester soil to dispel fears of radiation?

March 20, 2016

Fukushima farmers grow flowers using polyester 'soil'

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201603200015>

By TORU FURUSHO/ Staff Writer

KAWAMATA, Fukushima Prefecture--Farmers here have started growing flowers using polyester "soil" in the hope that the cultivation method will dispel concerns among consumers about radioactive contamination from the nuclear disaster.

The farmers are being helped by a team from Kinki University's Faculty of Agriculture in Higashi-Osaka, Osaka Prefecture, and have started cultivating anthurium ornamental plants utilizing the soil, which is made up of filamentous polyester fabrics.

"This cultivation method allows us to grow plants without concern over the negative impact of the nuclear accident," said Yukichi Takahashi, a 76-year-old farmer who is a key member of the project. "My dream is that our flowers will be used in bouquets to be presented to athletes on the podium during the 2020 Tokyo Olympics."

In a test run, 2,000 anthurium plants, known for their colorful, heart-shaped flowers, were grown in a 30-meter-long greenhouse in the Ojima district of Kawamata, located about 50 kilometers northwest of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Local farmers who participate in the project will set up an agricultural corporation later this year with the aim of eventually starting full-fledged farming and shipment.

The project began in spring 2014 after the university researchers learned about the plight of local farmers when they visited to measure radiation levels in the town, which is located on a high plateau surrounded by mountains.

"By using polyester fabrics as a cultivation medium instead of ground soil, this new method will help protect Fukushima farmers from harmful rumors that may stem from consumers' concerns over soil contamination," said project leader Takahiro Hayashi, a professor of horticulture at the university, which is known for its advanced aquafarming and agricultural programs.

Kawamata once prospered through livestock and tobacco farming, but the nuclear disaster, triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, dealt a heavy blow to the area's agricultural industry by spreading a large amount of radioactive fallout.

A southeastern strip of the town is still designated as a "zone being prepared for the lifting of the evacuation order," and local residents remain evacuated from the district in temporary housing and elsewhere.

While radiation levels in the town's agricultural produce have passed safety tests, consumers' lingering concerns over possible contamination have undercut market competitiveness.

Evacuation & nukes: Time to get real

March 15, 2016

EDITORIAL: Time to get serious about evacuations from nuclear disasters

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201603150037>

Nearly half of the radiation monitoring posts installed for issuing evacuation orders around the Sendai nuclear power plant in Kagoshima Prefecture have been found unable to perform the required function. Twenty-two of the 48 monitoring posts around Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai plant can only measure airborne radiation levels up to 80 microsieverts per hour, far below the 500-microsievert threshold that triggers immediate evacuation orders, according to a survey by The Asahi Shimbun. The survey also found that monitoring devices have not been installed at many of the designated locations around Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Takahama nuclear power plant, where two reactors were restarted in January and February.

The two reactors, however, are now out of service again in line with a recently issued court injunction. These findings mean there are insufficiencies in the way to obtain crucial data for deciding on whether to evacuate local residents from areas around these nuclear plants during severe accidents.

Despite these serious safety lapses, reactors at the two plants were brought online. How seriously do the utilities, central and local governments take the safety of residents?

Nearby local governments that are in a position to monitor nuclear accidents by using these devices should ask the utilities to suspend reactor operations at least until useful radiation measuring instruments have been installed at all the posts.

Following the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in March 2011, the central government revised its guidelines on responding to nuclear disasters.

The revised guidelines mandate immediate evacuations of residents within 5 kilometers of a nuclear plant where a serious accident has taken place. Residents living between 5 km and 30 km from an accident-stricken plant will be required to stay indoors while the central government decides whether to order evacuations based on radiation levels detected by the monitoring posts.

Immediate evacuations will be ordered if radiation levels reach 500 microsieverts per hour. If radiation levels rise to and stay at 20 microsieverts per hour for an entire day, residents will be ordered to evacuate within a week. In both cases, the central government will issue the orders.

If the network of radiation monitoring posts fails to function properly, evacuation decisions for specific areas could be delayed or misguided.

With financial support from the central government, local governments concerned are required to install these monitoring posts. It is baffling why the local governments that host the two plants consented to the reactor restarts despite the insufficient monitoring installations.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority should not be allowed to shirk responsibility for the matter by claiming that dealing with issues related to the evacuations of residents is not part of its mandate.

The SPEEDI radioactive fallout-forecasting system failed to work properly during the Fukushima nuclear crisis. So the NRA decided to replace the SPEEDI system with networks of monitoring posts to measure radiation levels around nuclear plants for making evacuation decisions.

The NRA should be the one that checks if the posts will be workable in actual accidents.

Even the stricter nuclear safety standards cannot completely eliminate the risk of accidents. That makes it vital to make adequate preparations based on the assumption that nuclear disasters can occur.

The belated acceptance of this internationally common premise doesn't amount to much if such a lax attitude is taken toward evacuations.

The principle that local governments should take the responsibility to protect local residents from various disasters is reasonable to a certain extent.

However, as far as nuclear disasters are concerned, this principle should not allow the central government to avoid playing a key role and shuffle off its responsibility.

The system needs changes so that the effectiveness of evacuation plans will be sufficiently checked by the central government and especially by the NRA, which has the necessary expertise.

Such reforms will prevent the restarts of reactors under such inadequate evacuation conditions by ensuring central government inspections in addition to safety checks by the local governments concerned.

In some disasters, individuals can make their own decisions concerning their safety. But a nuclear accident is not one of them.

Both the central and local governments should play far greater roles and assume far more important responsibilities in nuclear accidents than in other kinds of disasters.

Deregulation: What's in it for people?

March 22, 2016

What benefits, options will liberalization of electricity industry bring to consumers?

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160322/p2a/00m/0na/015000c>

The country's retail electricity market will be fully liberalized in April, allowing consumers to freely choose and decide which companies they want to buy electricity from.

Ten major regional power companies such as Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) have so far been monopolizing the retail electricity market for regular households, but a number of business operators have decided to make new entrants into the market, competing to acquire customers through cheaper rate plans and other means. What changes will the power deregulation bring to people's livelihoods? The following are some key points for choosing power suppliers and related issues.

There were 253 new entrants or new electricity companies registered with the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry as of March 18, and nearly a half of them are planning to sell electricity to households. There are a variety of new entrants: major oil wholesalers that have their own thermal power plants; major telecom carriers that are set to sell electricity purchased from other suppliers as packages with their own services; start-up companies that are set to sell mainly renewable energy such as solar generated electricity; and other firms. They have actively been engaged in publicity campaigns to attract customers, presenting rates that are up to 10 percent cheaper than those from major power companies. JX Nippon Oil & Energy Corp., Japan's largest oil wholesaler, emphasized its experience in selling electricity for more than a decade, with a campaign slogan saying, "We are an experienced power distributor." The company entered the electricity market for businesses in 2003. It has a production capacity of 1.63 million kilowatts of electricity that exceeds the capacity of a single nuclear power plant, using oil leftover from refining petroleum, among other means. Tokyo Gas Co., too, has been generating electricity by using liquefied natural gas it procures on its own as raw material and selling the electricity to businesses through its affiliated companies. Gas and oil companies are challenging major power companies by taking advantage of their accumulated expertise to sell electricity at low prices. KDDI Corp., a major telecom carrier, is to enter the retail electricity market under the banner of its "au denki" brand. It will not have its own power plants, but rather receive power supplies from Kansai Electric Power Co. and other utilities. KDDI is to attract its users by returning up to 5 percent of their electricity bills to its mobile phone service contractors in the form of electric money. Jupiter Telecommunications Co., Japan's top cable television operator, is to procure electricity from a trading company that also is an investor of the telecom firm and offer discounts on electricity bills for its customers who have signed up for packages of electricity and cable television services.

In addition to rate plans for electricity supplied by TEPCO, mobile company SoftBank Corp. has set up a plan with renewable energy sources such as solar power making up 57 percent of the total supply. There have been movements aimed at securing "local production and local consumption" by utilizing renewable energy generated in each region. One of the examples is Miyama Smart Energy Co. launched by the Miyama Municipal Government in Fukuoka Prefecture.

Major power companies have prepared to compete with new electricity providers, with TEPCO, for example, offering rate plans designed to give discounts of up to 5 percent. However, Kansai Electric has abandoned its plan to start offering discounts on power bills from May after the Otsu District Court issued a provisional injunction ordering the company to suspend operations of the No. 3 and 4 reactors at its Takahama Nuclear Power Plant in Fukui Prefecture. The utilities could face an uphill battle if their nuclear reactors that are capable of generating power at low costs remain idled.

Meanwhile, new electricity providers are entering the retail electricity market mainly in densely-populated Tokyo, Osaka and other major cities. According to the Japan Organization for Cross-regional Coordination of Transmission Operators, which promotes consumers to switch power providers, there were 274,000 applications filed for new rate plans as of Feb. 26. But more than 90 percent of them were concentrated in the service areas of TEPCO and Kansai Electric. Therefore, there are still insufficient options for households in regions where the number of new entrants is small.

March 12, 2016

Knowledge is power: Navigating the household electricity market after deregulation

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/12/business/tech/knowledge-power-navigating-household-electricity-market-deregulation/#.VuVEG-aDmot>

by Eric Johnston

Staff Writer

The country's household and small business electricity market will be deregulated from April 1, allowing individuals to choose their electricity provider. Optimists, especially renewable energy advocates and small entrepreneurs, hope the development will break the stranglehold that the country's 10 regional utilities have on a market worth an estimated ¥8 trillion.

However, while around 200 firms are currently prepared to sell electricity generated by a wide range of sources under a broad range of plans, **utilities still control the distribution grid**. That, combined with intense price competition and restrictions on how sellers advertise, means consumers hoping to reduce their dependency on, or break free entirely of, nuclear and fossil-fueled electricity after April 1 are going to have to research different firms, costs and plans very carefully before signing a contract.

At the end of February, Kansai Electric Power Co. was feeling upbeat about the future of nuclear power. Five years after the March 11, 2011, earthquake, tsunami and meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, it had restarted its Takahama No. 3 reactor and was preparing to extend operations of its Takahama No. 1 and 2 reactors, now more than 40 years old, for another two decades.

With a Nuclear Regulation Authority widely seen as favorable toward restarts, a fundamentally pro-nuclear Fukui prefectural governor and local town councils hosting its nuclear plants desperate for the money that comes with restarts, Kepco was confident that nuclear power was finally back.

It helped that Takahama's No. 4 reactor was also scheduled to restart at the end of February. To the shock of Kepco officials, however, television cameras invited to broadcast live the flick of a switch to restart the reactor instead recorded loud alarms and scenes of worried staff running around, realizing there was a problem and that the reactor could not be restarted, at least on that day.

Then, in a move that shocked the utility, the Otsu District Court in Shiga Prefecture issued a provisional injunction last week that forced the Takahama No. 3 reactor to shut down a little over 40 days after it had restarted. The injunction also applied to the idled No. 4 reactor.

Why the rush to restart? Without as many of its reactors as possible back online as quickly as possible, Kepco says it will be unable to reduce electricity rates. That means the utility, which relied on nuclear power for nearly half of its electricity prior to March 11, 2011, and has enjoyed a virtual monopoly in Kansai for decades, could lose out once the country's household electricity market is deregulated on April 1 and it faces new competition.

To date, nearly 200 enterprises — ranging from the 10 regional utilities to SoftBank, Lawson's convenience stores and new firms emphasizing gas or renewable-generated electricity — are officially authorized to sell electricity to consumers. **A price war has broken out, with some newcomers promising rates that are often lower than the utilities.**

Yet the deregulation, as noted previously, is only partial. The major utilities will still be in control of the electricity grids. For the first time, however, individual consumers will be able to pick and choose who sells them the electricity off the grid.

The opening of the household and small business sector to retail competition has created a lot of interest among firms seeking to enter the market, but it has also created a number of concerns about supply and service, even as consumers express show a keen interest in switching.

A survey of 1,000 people last November by the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy on how they felt about the deregulation showed that if their electricity bills were to come down by at least 10 percent, 62 percent would consider changing suppliers. Just 8 percent said they would not switch companies, no matter how much lower the competition might be.

In an attempt to allay such fears, the government has said that switching providers will not mean a decrease in the quality of electricity and that in the event of problems at one of the newer firms with distribution, the major utilities would back them up by sending power down the line, thus preventing blackouts.

From the end of January, a number of companies began offering electricity plans on various websites. Consumers looking for the best deals can begin by going online to those websites that compare the different firms, their provider contracts and prices. Three popular sites (available only in Japanese) can be found at Kakaku.com, Enechange.jp and Enepi.jp.

Each site will request basic information, such as where you live, how many people live with you, and what kind of building (house or apartment) you live in.

You may then be asked who your current electricity supplier is, how much electricity you are contracted for and how much you actually use. The latter information is available on the meter card of your current provider.

Depending on the site, you might also be asked the amount of your most recent electricity bill, or other information about your electricity use and preferences.

Once the pertinent data has been entered, you'll be taken to a simulation site that offers a list of firms each with different prices, plans and conditions. And it's here where the buyer needs to beware. **There are any number of plans from any number of firms. Some lock you into a two-year contract and place financial penalties if you cancel before that (very important to know if you're planning to move within one or two years). Some plans may have strict conditions on the price offered, depending on how much electricity you buy and the time of day you want to use it.**

After doing a simulation that compares prices and services from different plans, you can make your choice and sign a contract.

Roughly three weeks later, on average, the firm will send someone to your home to install a smart meter. In principle, you won't be charged for the cost of replacing your old meter with a new one, unless there are special construction needs.

Once the new meter has been installed, you're on the new plan and you can cancel your contract with whoever was providing you electricity before.

Kikuko Tatsumi, a member of the Nippon Association of Consumer Specialists' environment committee, notes that many of the plans currently on offer are package deals that include services other than electricity, and that people need to consider the sorts of add-ons that might be included in a plan and consider their needs carefully.

"Don't forget that what you're buying is electricity," she says.

In addition, Tatsumi cautions, be prepared for **aggressive sales tactics** from those representing, or claiming to represent, an electricity supplier.

"I've heard stories of people getting phone calls from those claiming to represent a group like the 'security association,' who inquire about a person's electricity bill and say they want to visit to discuss it," Tatsumi says. "There are a lot of complaints about flyers being stuffed in mailboxes or salespeople telephoning, trying to sell electricity plans."

Price, of course, will be the final determining factor for many consumers. This may well mean going with firms that get their electricity mostly from fossil fuel sources (and possibly nuclear power) if they want the cheapest plan.

For environmentally concerned households that dislike nuclear power, don't mind paying a bit extra if necessary, and demand to know what energy source the electricity from the firm they are purchasing comes from in order to select a supplier that minimizes, or even excludes entirely, coal, oil or nuclear-generated electricity, there is good news and bad news.

The good news is that **firms are being encouraged to offer customers a breakdown of the different sources of electricity they're selling, and over what period they plan to use that energy mix.** For example, sellers are allowed to let households know that, over a certain length of time, they'll be sending them electricity, of which, for example, 50 percent is generated from coal or oil, 10 percent is from liquefied natural gas, 30 percent is from nuclear and 10 percent is from renewables.

The bad news is that providing as much detailed information as possible on energy sources is not a legal requirement for the firms, merely something that is "desired."

In fact, very few of those registered to sell electricity so far appear to be that specific. A survey of 20 firms in the March 1 edition of the Japanese magazine *Economist* showed less than half were offering detailed information on their sites about the energy mix they were using.

Furthermore, in the case of renewable-generated energy covered by the country's feed-in tariff, firms are being discouraged from using phrases such as "we sell green power" or "we sell clean power."

In one sense this is good — it will make it tougher for unscrupulous firms to misrepresent themselves by using such language if the majority of power they're selling comes from energies that are anything but clean.

However, it also forces consumers searching for firms and plans that offer the greenest possible supply source at the most affordable price to make some tough choices if the company offering a deal within their budget won't say where the electricity comes from.

For those want to go as green as possible, one option is to visit the Power Shift website. Run by Friends of the Earth Japan, here you will find a dozen firms (as of early March) that offer customers their energy mix and environmental impact; concentrate on purchasing renewable energy under the feed-in tariff program; agree to not use nuclear or fossil fuel-generated electricity, except as backup sources; emphasize local usage of renewable energy; and are not funded by the big utilities. Of the dozen firms currently listed, eight are in the Tokyo region, two are in Kyushu and there is one each in the Osaka and Nagoya regions. "We interview firms that want to prioritize renewable energy and have plans for doing so," says Akiko Yoshida of Power Shift. "Many are small — and the amount of renewable energy in Japan is still limited — so it's really difficult for the firms we list to sell only renewable-generated electricity. It doesn't mean companies focused on selling renewable-energy generated electricity are expensive, but they can't offer supercheap prices, either."

As the major utilities control the grids and because they remain wary of renewable energy, the extent to which the sector will expand from April is as yet unclear, even if some firms offer plans that are very competitive with fossil fuel electricity. **By 2020, however, grid transmission of electricity will be deregulated, theoretically allowing for competition and easier access to renewable energy sources.**

Of course, the utilities know this, which is why **firms such as Kepco are in a race against time.** Even as the Takahama reactors sit idle under the injunction, the utility wants to restart them and run them for another two decades.

Not only to revive nuclear power, which Kepco claims will allow it to lower its own prices, but also to ensure that, as Japanese bureaucrats once did when they picked and chose which industries to support,

that deregulation does not lead to “excessive competition” that would threaten to impede their old ways of doing business, or cause too much “confusion in the marketplace” of the kind that is not good for the politically connected utilities.

Dissecting consumer energy choices online

For more information on finding and selecting a new electricity supplier after April 1, check the following websites:

The Electricity Market Surveillance Commission: The commission is the government body that monitors firms selling to the home electricity market. It can provide information on which ones are officially registered, and offer consultations if you run into trouble with the firm you’re buying from. www.emsc.meti.go.jp

The National Consumer Affairs Center: The center offers basic advice along the lines of “let the buyer beware,” with suggestions on the kinds of questions to ask anyone who shows up at your door on a Sunday morning, or calls during dinner and tries to sell you a new electricity plan. www.kokusen.go.jp

Electricity Plan Comparison Sites: At Kakaku.com (kakaku.com/energy), Enechange.jp (enechange.jp) or Enepi.jp (enepi.jp), consumers can log on, provide basic details about themselves, their energy lifestyles and the amount they are currently paying, and receive a list of different plans from different firms that might suit their needs.

Power Shift: This is the site for consumers who want to be clean, green and nuclear-free to the greatest extent possible using government-approved, local sellers, and don’t mind paying extra. power-shift.org/choice

Return to normal?

March 26, 2016

Locally raised salmon released for 1st time since nuclear disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201603260045>

By AKIFUMI NAGAHASHI/ Staff Writer

NARAHA, Fukushima Prefecture--Thousands of juvenile salmon were released into a river here on March 26, signaling that life in this area is returning to normal after it was delisted as a nuclear disaster evacuation zone last September.

The area until the fall of last year had remained off-limits since the 2011 accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Members of the local Kidogawa fishery cooperative association raised the fish at a hatchery that was destroyed by the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake-triggered tsunami and is now undergoing reconstruction.

At 11 a.m., a couple of dozen people, many of them members of the association and children of a kindergarten in Naraha, released 5,000 or so young salmon, each measuring about five centimeters, from buckets into the river. The fish swam vigorously in the direction of the sea.

It was the third time since the nuclear accident that juvenile salmon have been released into the river. On the previous two occasions, however, the fish were not locally raised but donated by out-of-town organizations.

Fishermen returned to the Kidogawa river for the first time in five years last autumn.

From the salmon they caught, they took eggs and were able to raise 1.3 million or so salmon fry. But the figure is still less than one-tenth of pre-accident levels.

"It will take 10 more years to recover pre-accident levels," said Hideo Matsumoto, head of the association. "I hope that the young salmon released this time will return to this river safely (to spawn)," he added.

70% of razing requests not yet completed

March 20, 2016

Razing of wrecked homes lagging badly as Fukushima residents ponder return

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/20/national/razing-of-wrecked-homes-lagging-badly-as-fukushima-residents-ponder-return/#.Vu6dSXqDmov>

Fukushima Minpo

The central government is covering the demolition costs for disaster-hit homes in Fukushima Prefecture, but 70 percent of the razing requests have not been completed.

The Environment Ministry plans to revise the procedures for handling demolition requests because the situation could further prevent residents from returning to the radiation-tainted areas.

As of Jan. 8, 5,780 applications — or over 70 percent of the 7,670 demolition requests — had not been processed.

Minamisoma aims to have the central government lift evacuation orders in most of the city this spring. But only 30 percent of the 2,600 houses earmarked for demolition have been razed, leaving 1,780 to go.

The town of Kawamata and the village of Katsurao also want evacuation orders lifted from April, but the razing is only 17 percent complete in Kawamata and 6 percent in Katsurao. Tamura and the village of Kawauchi have meanwhile torn down all homes earmarked for demolition.

The ministry says the time-consuming nature of the work is one reason for the backlog, since it involves confirming ownership, inspecting properties and calculating costs.

The central government has expanded the program to cover not only houses damaged by the quake and tsunami, but also those damaged by leaky roofs during the prolonged evacuation. This raised applications to a level officials can't keep up with, the ministry said.

Evacuees are calling for speedier action. Tomoya Suzuki, 67, who fled the Odaka district of Minamisoma to the town of Shinchi further north, applied to have his house demolished last August. His application is still pending.

"I would like to go back to Odaka as soon as the evacuation orders are lifted, but I can't rebuild my house unless it's demolished," he said.

The government has said it will lift evacuation orders in Minamisoma by March 2017.

"The central government has decided to lift evacuation orders when the living environment for the residents is not prepared yet," he said. "I find that contradictory."

The ministry says it cannot drastically increase manpower, and will deal with the glut by giving priority to those who wish to return.

This section features topics and issues covered by the Fukushima Minpo, the largest newspaper in Fukushima Prefecture. The original article was published on Feb. 29.

Fishing still plagued by nuclear disaster

March 11, 2016

Catch limits, safety worries take toll on Fukushima fishery

<http://features.japantimes.co.jp/march-11-radiation/#part3>

KAZUAKI NAGATA

Staff writer

IWAKI, FUKUSHIMA PREF. — Over the past five years, fishermen in the disaster-struck regions of Miyagi and Iwate prefectures have revived their industry, steadily increasing the catch and shipment of oysters, seaweed and other local specialties.

But for the fishing industry in Fukushima Prefecture, the turnaround has been slow, and plagued by the impact of the nuclear disaster that caused massive amounts of radioactive water to flow to the Pacific Ocean.

“I think we are making some progress. The fishermen couldn’t fish for more than a year (after 3/11),” said Yoshihisa Komatsu, deputy director of administration at the Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations. But the speed of the progress “is slow, as it’s been already five years,” he said.

Recovery for Fukushima’s fishing industry has come in small steps. After March 11, 2011, fishermen voluntarily stopped fishing. They resumed in June 2012, although only on a trial basis, and the government slapped an outright ban on the sale of certain species deemed likely to be radioactive. The blacklist affected more than 35 types of fish caught off the Fukushima coast, which was famous for flounder, angler fish and rockfish.

Under the trial, fishing boats were allowed to catch a small amount of other species but were required to check their radiation levels. If the fish were found to be uncontaminated, they were shipped off to market. The goal is to see the reaction of consumers, who have largely avoided eating fish from the prefecture due to radiation worries.

The catch has significantly gone down in Fukushima, with only about 5,600 tons of fish caught in 2015, down from about 38,600 tons before 3/11.

To increase the catch, Komatsu said it was essential to lift the shipping ban.

“We can make the first step (toward full recovery) once the ban is lifted from all fish,” said Komatsu.

While the sales ban on several species has been lifted, 28 kinds of fish remain on the list.

Trial fishing, meanwhile, has been expanded from three species to 72.

In addition, radiation-contaminated fish have drastically decreased.

According to the prefecture, about 50 percent of the fish samples tested for radiation levels exceeded the government-designated maximum of 100 becquerels per kilogram right after the nuclear disaster started in 2011. But after April 2015, no fish has exceeded that limit.

As a result, the Fukushima fisheries cooperative federation is now looking to expand the permissible fishing area closer to the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

Currently, fishermen can only fish outside of a 20-km radius of the plant. They want to expand this to a 10-km radius after Tokyo Electric Power Co. last October completed a sea wall that blocks contaminated groundwater from reaching the Pacific. Since then, the level of contamination near the plant has decreased.

While many take this as a positive sign toward recovery, concerns remain.

“If some fish show high levels of contamination, it could hurt efforts to fight the harmful rumors” about the safety of products from the area, Komatsu said.

Fukushima has suffered from a tainted image due to the Fukushima nuclear plant calamity, affecting everything from farm to marine products — something the prefecture has constantly been fighting.

“The harmful rumors need to end to some degree before the trial fishing ends and full-scale fishing resumes,” said Hiromitsu Endo, who represents distributor in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture.

Currently, his association of 28 distributors sell fish caught under the trial to the market.

But once fishing returns to full scale, the association will be disbanded, with each firm left on their own to sell their catch to customers. If the bad image remains, they fear they will have a hard time.

“It will be too late to start fighting the harmful rumors then,” Endo said.

Even five years after the disaster started, the harmful rumors persist, he said.

Although Fukushima Prefecture monitors radiation levels of fish, shipping only products that are not contaminated, distributors said some stores were reluctant to market the products because they didn’t sell well.

To wipe out the bad image, Komatsu of Fukushima fisheries cooperative said the industry needed to keep proving through trial fishing that the fish being sold was safe.

“The harmful rumors need to end to some degree before the trial fishing ends and full-scale fishing resumes.”

Voluntary evacuees: Where to?

March 26, 2016

70% of voluntary Fukushima evacuees undecided where to live after free housing ends

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160326/p2a/00m/0na/012000c>

Japanese version

Some 70 percent of voluntary Fukushima nuclear crisis evacuees have not decided where they will live once a free housing program winds up at the end of March 2017, a Fukushima Prefectural Government survey has found.

Beginning in May, prefectural officials will visit these evacuees to provide support for rebuilding their lives in line with their wishes.

The survey was sent to some 12,539 households outside the nuclear disaster evacuation zones -- as well as to tsunami survivors -- who have moved to other areas both inside and outside the prefecture.

Preliminary survey results were based on 9,944 households (4,636 in the prefecture, and 5,308 in other parts of Japan) who had evacuated to temporary residences, including apartments.

A total of 6,091 households, or 61.3 percent, responded to the survey. These included people who will not be able to move into permanent housing units until March 2018 due to delays in the construction of disaster-related public housing or new private homes, among other reasons.

A total of 1,774 respondents, or about 30 percent, said they have decided on their housing for April 2017 and onward. Nearly 40 percent of those who have evacuated within Fukushima Prefecture have already planned their future accommodation, against just 20 percent of those who have left the prefecture.

Meanwhile, 4,285 respondents have said that they remain undecided about where they will be living after the free accommodation period has ended. Among these, around 90 percent of those living in Fukushima Prefecture indicated that they wished to stay there.

Among those living outside of the prefecture, some 10 percent said that they wanted to return, while about 70 percent said they wished to continue living outside of Fukushima, and roughly 20 percent said that they were undecided.

"We would like to work together with local governments that have taken in evacuees to provide support to ensure that people will be able to secure housing," noted Masaaki Matsumoto, head of the Fukushima Prefectural Government's Evacuees Support Division.

The prefecture has also announced it will shoulder half of residents' rent payments (up to 30,000 yen per month) for low-income and single-parent households for the first year after the free housing scheme has ended, and one-third (up to 20,000 yen monthly) for the second year.

"My husband had to find new work (when we first evacuated here), and his income was reduced," said Mayumi Takahashi, 44, who lives in the city of Niigata's Nishi Ward together with her husband and two elementary school-aged children. The family moved there after voluntarily evacuating from Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture, following the disaster. "We have absolutely no idea at this point about the future, because we do not even know where we want to live -- much less whether we want to rent another apartment or build a new home."

She added with confusion and apprehension, "Without free housing, we will be unable to live. The free housing program is ending too early."

Tarachine: Mothers set up radiation lab

French translation available at :

<http://www.fukushima->

[blog.com/?utm_source=_ob_email&utm_medium=_ob_notification&utm_campaign=_ob_pushmail](http://www.fukushima-blog.com/?utm_source=_ob_email&utm_medium=_ob_notification&utm_campaign=_ob_pushmail)

March 13, 2016

The mothers who set up a radiation lab

<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35784923?SThisFB>

By Alessia Cerantola BBC World Service, Iwaki

- From the section Magazine



Image copyright Emanuele Satolli

Five years ago an earthquake off the coast of Japan triggered a tsunami and a series of meltdowns at the Fukushima nuclear plant. Kaori Suzuki's home is nearby - determined to stay, but worried about her children's health, she and some other mothers set up a laboratory to measure radiation.

A woman in a white lab coat puts some yellow organic material on a slide, while grey liquid bubbles in vials behind her. Other women, one of them heavily pregnant, discuss some data on a computer screen. A courier delivers a small parcel which is opened and its contents catalogued.

But this is no ordinary laboratory. None of these women trained as scientists. One used to be a beautician, another was a hairdresser, yet another used to work in an office. Together they set up a non-profit organisation - Tarachine - 50km (30 miles) down the coast from the Fukushima nuclear plant, to measure radiation in the city of Iwaki.

Kaori Suzuki, the lab's director, shows me a list of results. "This is the level of strontium 90 in Niboshi, dried small sardines, from the prefecture of Chiba," she says.

"What about this food?" I ask, pointing out a high number.

"Mushrooms have higher levels [of radiation]. The government has forbidden people from eating wild mushrooms, but many people don't care, they take them and eat," she says.

The lab mainly measures the radioactive isotopes caesium 134 and 137, and collects data on gamma radiation. Strontium 90 and tritium were only added to the list in April last year. "Since they emit only beta rays we weren't able to detect them until recently. Specific tools were necessary and we couldn't afford them," says Suzuki. Thanks to a generous donation, they now have the right equipment.

Tarachine publishes its findings online every month, and advises people to avoid foods with high readings as well as the places they were grown.

★Gamma-ray			(Bq/Kg raw:Weight of raw sample Bq/Kg dry:Weight of dried sample)							
Samples	Sampling Point	Sampling Month	Measurement Result		Uncertainty		Total Amount of Cesium	Minimum Limit of Detection		
Rice	Aizu	Oct-15	Cs137	—	10/15	± —	Under Minimum Limit of Detection	Cs137	2.5	
			Cs134	—	10/15	± —		Cs134	2.3	
Rice	Ishikawa Ishikawa	Oct-15	Cs137	—	10/15	± —	Under Minimum Limit of Detection	Cs137	2.2	
			Cs134	—	10/15	± —		Cs134	2.1	
Brown rice	Sakai Osaka	Oct-15	Cs137	—	10/15	± —	Under Minimum Limit of Detection	Cs137	1.1	
			Cs134	—	10/15	± —		Cs134	1.0	
Yuzu (citrus fruits)	Hobara Date	Jan-16	Cs137	8.8	10/15	± 2.5	12.0	Cs137	2.4	
			Cs134	3.2	10/15	± 1.6		Cs134	2.3	
Lemon	Ena Iwaki	Jan-16	Cs137	6.5	10/15	± 2.4	6.5	Cs137	4.7	
			Cs134	—	10/15	± —		Cs134	—	
Kawano-natsudaidai orange (without peel)	Yunagaya Jyoban Iwaki	Jan-16	Cs137	—	10/15	± —	Under Minimum Limit of Detection	Cs137	1.2	
			Cs134	—	10/15	± —		Cs134	1.1	
Apple (without peel)	Fukushima	Dec-15	Cs137	—	10/15	± —	Under Minimum Limit of Detection	Cs137	2.7	
			Cs134	—	10/15	± —		Cs134	2.5	
Butterbur sprout	Kubo Kashima Iwaki	Jan-16	Cs137	—	10/15	± —	Under Minimum Limit of Detection	Cs137	2.3	
			Cs134	—	10/15	± —		Cs134	2.6	
Dried persimmon	Touno Iwaki	Oct-15	Cs137	3.2	10/15	± 1.5	3.2	Cs137	2.1	
			Cs134	—	10/15	± —		Cs134	1.7	
Pollution raw wood shiitake mushrooms	Nagasaki Iwaki	Jan-16	Cs137	198	10/15	± 40.0	253	Cs137	8.1	
			Cs134	54.9	10/15	± 12.8		Cs134	7.4	
Thinly sliced and dried strips of radish	Tabito Iwaki	unknown	Cs137	3.4	10/15	± 1.9	3.4	Cs137	2.8	
			Cs134	—	10/15	± —		Cs134	2.5	
Thinly sliced and dried strips of radish	Iwaki	unknown	Cs137	4.2	10/15	± 2.7	4.2	Cs137	3.9	
			Cs134	—	10/15	± —		Cs134	3.6	

Image copyright Tarachine

Find out more

- Kaori Suzuki spoke to Outlook on the BBC World Service

Five years ago, Suzuki knew nothing about radiation. She spent her time looking after her two children and teaching yoga. The earthquake on 11 March 2011 changed everything.

"I've never experienced so much shaking before and I was very scared. Right from the moment it started I had a feeling that something might have happened to the nuclear plant," she says. "The first thing I did was to fill up my car with petrol. I vividly remember that moment."

The authorities evacuated the area around the nuclear plant - everyone within a 20km (12-mile) radius was told to leave, and those who lived up to 30km (18 miles) away were instructed to stay indoors.

Despite living outside the exclusion zone, Suzuki and her family fled and drove south. The roads were congested with cars and petrol stations ran dry.

"We didn't come back home until the middle of April and even then we wondered if it was safe to stay," says Suzuki. "But my husband has his own business with 70 employees, so we felt we couldn't leave."

Although radiation levels in Iwaki were officially quite low, the "invisible enemy" was all people could talk about. Conversations with friends changed abruptly from being about children, food and fashion, to one topic only: radiation. "You can't see, smell or feel it, so it is something people are afraid of," says Suzuki.

Above all, people didn't know what was safe to eat.

"It was a matter of life and death," she says.

Fukushima is farming country and many people grow their own vegetables. "People here love to eat home-grown food and there's a strong sense of community with people offering food to their friends and neighbours," says Suzuki. This caused a lot of anxiety. "A difficult situation would arise where grandparents would be growing food, but younger mothers would be worried about giving it to their children."

Suzuki formed the group "Iwaki Action Mama" together with other mothers in the area. At first they organised demonstrations against nuclear power, but then they decided on a new tactic - they would learn how to measure radiation themselves.

Image copyright Emanuele Satolli

They saved and collected \$600 (£420) to buy their first Geiger counter online, but when it arrived the instructions were written in English, which none of them understood. But they persevered and with the help of experts and university professors, organised training workshops. Soon they knew all about becquerels, a unit used to measure radiation, and sieverts, a measure of radiation dose. They would meet at restaurants and cafes to compare readings.

Becquerels and Sieverts

- A becquerel (Bq), named after French physicist Henri Becquerel, is a measure of radioactivity
- A quantity of radioactive material has an activity of 1Bq if one nucleus decays per second - and 1kBq if 1,000 nuclei decay per second
- A sievert (Sv) is a measure of radiation absorbed by a person, named after Swedish medical physicist Rolf Sievert

In November 2011 the women decided to get serious and set up a laboratory. They raised money and managed to buy their first instrument designed specifically to measure food contamination - it cost 3 million yen (£18,500, or \$26,400).

They named the laboratory Tarachine, which means mothers - in particular, "beautiful mothers that protect their families" according to Suzuki.

"We felt as though we were on the front line of a battlefield," Suzuki says. "When you're at war you do what you have to do, and measuring was the thing we felt we had to do."

Image copyright Emanuele Satolli

Today Tarachine has 12 employees, and more work than it can handle. People bring in food, earth, grass and leaves from their backyards for testing. The results are published for everyone to see. At first the lab was able to provide results after three or four days, but its service has become so popular it can hardly keep up. "We have so many requests for strontium 90 now that it can take three months," says Prof Hikaru Amano, the lab's technical manager.

Amano confesses he was surprised that a group of amateurs could learn to do this job so accurately, but says it is important work.

People began to mistrust the nuclear contamination data provided by the government and by the Tokyo Electric Power Company (Tepco), which manages the nuclear plant, he says.

About 100 so-called "citizen laboratories" have since sprung up, but Tarachine is unusual because it monitors both gamma and beta rays - most can only measure gamma rays - and because it tests whatever people want, whether it's a home-grown carrot or the dust from their vacuum-cleaner.

The government does take regular readings from fixed points in Fukushima prefecture. It also check harvests and foods destined for the market - for example, all Fukushima-grown rice is required to undergo radiation checks before shipping.

But "if you want to know the level of strontium and tritium in your garden, the government won't do this measurement," says Suzuki. "If you decide to measure it yourself, you'll need 200,000-250,000 yen (£1,535, or \$2,200) for the tests, and ordinary people can't afford to pay these costs. We have to keep doing this job so that people can have the measurements they want." Tarachine only charges a small fee - less than 3,000 yen (£18, or \$27).

Image copyright Emanuele Satolli Image caption Mother of two Kaori Suzuki now spends much of her time at the laboratory

Tarachine also provides training and equipment to anyone who wants to do their own measurements. "Some of the mothers measure soil samples in their schools. It's fantastic, they really have become quite skilled at doing this," says Suzuki.

And the group keeps an eye on children's health. It runs a small clinic where doctors from all over Japan periodically come to provide free thyroid cancer check-ups for local children. Since screening began, 166 children in Fukushima prefecture have been diagnosed with - or are suspected of having - thyroid cancer. This is a far higher rate than in the rest of the country, although some experts say that's due to over-diagnosis.

And for parents who want to give their children a break from the local environment, Tarachine even organises summer trips to the south of the country.

Suzuki's own life has changed dramatically since 2011. "I was just a simple mother, enjoying her life. But ever since I started this, I've been spending most of my time here, from morning to night," she says. "I must admit, sometimes I think it would be really nice to have a break, but what we are doing is too important. We're providing a vital service.

"If you want to have peace of mind after an accident like the Fukushima one, then I believe you need to do what we're doing."

Kaori Suzuki spoke to *Outlook on the BBC World Service*

Why has slogan signboard been removed?

March 27, 2016

Fukushima town remains empty, but nuclear slogan disappears

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160327/p2g/00m/0dm/034000c>

March 27, 2016 (Mainichi Japan)

FUTABA, Fukushima (Kyodo) -- The clock at a train station here still points to 2:46 p.m., the time when the massive earthquake occurred on March 11, 2011, triggering devastating tsunami.

The town, which is home to part of Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s radiation-leaking Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, remains empty as all residents had to evacuate due to high levels of radiation following the nuclear accident triggered by the natural disaster five years ago.

At a gymnasium in Futaba, fallen ceiling panels were left without being cleared. Everything is covered with dust.

Just outside the gymnasium, there used to be a slogan which appeared frequently in media reports in the past five years. The signboard reading "Nuclear power: the energy for a bright future," has turned into an ironic reminder of how Japan had blindly worshipped nuclear energy's safety.

In December last year, the slogan was removed from the signboard by town authorities. The town explained that the signs had become "decrepit" and they could fall, according to Yuji Onuma, a Futaba resident who has evacuated to Ibaraki Prefecture near Tokyo.

Onuma, 40, is the one who created the slogan in 1988 when he was in the sixth grade. Back then, he was commended by the town mayor and felt "proud." Onuma recalls that he used to pass under the signboard every day on his commute to work.

But since the disaster and ensuing nuclear crisis, he started to feel "ashamed." Every time TV footage showed the slogan and the abandoned town as its background, Onuma says the conflicted feelings got worse.

Onuma then thought that he had to "deal with it once and for all." He asked the town to keep the signboard as it is to remember the nuclear accident, even though the request could see him face ridicule in the community.

On March 17 last year, however, the town assembly decided to remove it. Earlier in the month, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited Futaba. Town officials trimmed grown tree branches to welcome the premier, which made the sign even more visible.

Onuma opposed the removal, collecting some 7,000 signatures for his cause. In June, Mayor Shiro Izawa decided to keep the removed signboard at the town hall, but Onuma's request that it remain in its original position was denied. The signboard itself was taken away on March 4 this year.

Continuing to show the slogan "may have been inconvenient for (the government's plan to) resume idle nuclear reactors," said Onuma.

"The town put priority on the elimination of the slogan rather than cleanup of the debris" that still remains on the streets in Futaba, he added.

The town's no-go zone is eerily silent. The only things that hint of the life that was once there are blinking traffic lights.

At an elementary school's gymnasium, red-and-white curtains hang on the walls, probably for a graduation ceremony that had been planned in March five years ago.

A radiation detection device placed next to a thermometer in the school yard showed radiation levels of 2.141 microsieverts per hour -- some 10-times the level the government expects in decontaminated areas. Construction works to boost the quake-resistance of the school building had been finished the year before the earthquake and tsunami occurred. "The building survived the quake, but the works were in vain because of the nuclear accident," said Onuma.

Molten fuels to stay a long time in Fukushima

March 25, 2016

Fukushima Residents Concerned About Future

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/editors/4/20160325/>

There are lingering questions over the future of the area around the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, and where to store highly radioactive waste from the facility.

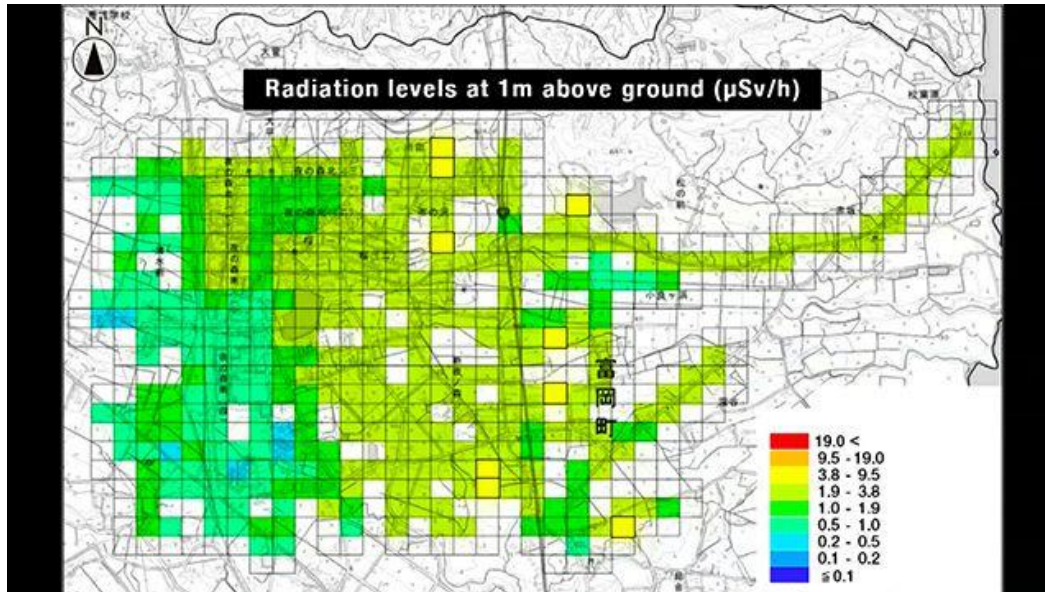
The Japanese government and the plant's operator plan to start removing molten fuels from the plant's damaged reactors in 2021. But there's been no decision yet on where to store it, and local people are concerned.

In an interview with NHK, the chairman of the Nuclear Regulation Authority said it will take time to decide on where to store damaged nuclear fuels. But he said the site of the Fukushima Daiichi plant is a likely possibility.

"I think there's no other way but to store them in the current site for a long time, under stable conditions," Shunichi Tanaka said. "We need to convince people in order to proceed."

Tanaka also stressed they will help improve the living environment near the plant before evacuation orders are lifted.

Part of that is assessing the radiation. Last December and February, the regulators conducted radiation surveys in Tomioka, not far from the nuclear plant. Access to the area is still prohibited for most people. It was the first detailed survey of its kind. Officials measured radiation levels every 2 meters.



Their findings are represented on this map. The bright-yellow spots are areas with high levels, but elsewhere they found the levels were below the government's standard.

Tanaka said they will conduct a larger scale survey within a year to provide data for more locals.

"With decontamination work, I think we create the right conditions for the residents to return," Tanaka said.

Some residents say they need to know more about the future risks before returning.

Reiko Hachisuka evacuated from her home in the town of Okuma after the accident. She recently took part in a meeting hosted by the nuclear regulators.

"We need more explanation to be convinced that we will never be ordered to evacuate again," she said at the event.

Tanaka said he is aware of the people's concerns.

"It will take time for the people to return even after the evacuation orders are lifted. We will make the utmost efforts to support them," he said.

Officials face the challenge of convincing former residents, even as they speed up preparations to lift most of the evacuation orders by March of next year.

They say they will carefully explain the situation and try to address residents' concerns.

Anguish (Fukumoto)

Fukushima Animation Makes Debut

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/videos/20160405103203696/>

« Anguish »

Fukumoto's animated film in which local people (Namie) can express their pain. They are the actors' voices.

Objective and scientific?

April 4, 2016

Fukushima students reach out to tell truth about radiation

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201604040044.html>

By YURI OIWA/ Staff Writer

Struck by ignorance about the 2011 nuclear disaster, high school science club members in Fukushima Prefecture enlisted the help of fellow students around Japan and abroad for a comparative study on radiation doses.

The results surprised even those living in the prefecture that hosts the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

"The individual doses (of external radiation exposure in high school students) were almost equal inside and outside of Fukushima Prefecture, and in European areas," Haruka Onodera, 18, said in English at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan (FCCJ) in Tokyo on Feb. 8.

A German correspondent asked her, "Would you declare Fukushima now safe?"

"Actually, **we didn't measure the doses in people living in the contaminated areas**, so we can't say all of Fukushima is safe," Onodera answered, often pausing in thought in the middle of her words and phrases. "But I hope we will send (personal dosimeters) to contaminated areas and help do risk management for people living there in the future."

Onodera, a third-year student of Fukushima High School and member of the physics and radiation division of the school's Super Science Club, also showed explanatory slides at the FCCJ news conference titled, "Fukushima and radiation monitoring. The goal of the project is to show the realities of Fukushima Prefecture to the rest of the world.

The club's physics and radiation division started the project in summer 2014. **It involved 216 high school students and teachers in Japan and abroad carrying personal dosimeters for two weeks.**

Six high schools in Fukushima Prefecture--Fukushima, Adachi, Aizu Gakuho, Iwaki, Asaka and Tamura--and another six located elsewhere in Japan--including in Gifu, Kanagawa, Nara and Hyogo prefectures--were involved in the project.

They were joined by 14 high schools from France, Poland and Belarus.

According to the measurements taken by the students, the annual radiation doses in Fukushima Prefecture ranged between 0.63 and 0.97 millisievert. For elsewhere in Japan, the range was from 0.55 to 0.87 millisievert, while in Europe, the annual doses were between 0.51 and 1.1 millisieverts.

The similar levels of external doses are believed to be partly attributable to the lower level of natural background radiation in Fukushima Prefecture compared with that in western Japan. That finding came from an analysis of a database on the radioactive content of soil in areas surrounding the different high schools across Japan.

Onodera, who was seated next to Ryugo Hayano, a professor of physics with the University of Tokyo, at the FCCJ news conference, had also presented the study results last year to a workshop of high school students in France and a conference on Fukushima foodstuffs held on the sidelines of an international food exposition in Italy.

Two second-year students of the Super Science Club--Minori Saito, 17, and Yuya Fujiwara, 17--gave a talk at a workshop organized in Date, Fukushima Prefecture, by the International Commission on Radiological Protection late last year.

First- and second-year students who are members of the club, joined by eight high school students from France, visited peach farmers and shiitake mushroom growers in Fukushima Prefecture in summer last year. It was part of a program for studying the current state of Fukushima from diverse views.

The students wanted to address global audiences after they were shocked by how little was known about the actual state of Fukushima Prefecture.

"Can humans live in Fukushima?" a French high school student asked the Fukushima students over Skype as part of an international exchange program in 2014.

That prompted the Japanese students to determine the actual situation on their own, and compare it with circumstances elsewhere in Japan and abroad. Hayano advised them to undertake the endeavor when he visited Fukushima High School to give a talk.

The findings of the study were surprising. Most of the Fukushima students expected the doses in Fukushima would be the highest, even by a large margin.

The students also studied how behavior affected the dose levels.

The Fukushima High School students were being exposed to lower radiation levels when they were at school than when they were at home. They believe the school's concrete buildings provided a more effective shield from radiation sources than the wooden houses did.

By contrast, students attending Ena High School in Gifu Prefecture were exposed to more radiation when they were at school, where granite, containing radiation sources, is used in the buildings.

Their analysis results were published in November in a British scientific journal on radiological protection. Onodera was involved in writing the research paper.

"The experience has brought home to me how important it is to address reality **objectively and scientifically**," she said.

Onodera said she was growing more interested in basic sciences and dreams of doing research on molecular biology at university.

"We hope to solicit help from people in evacuation zones within Fukushima Prefecture, and from high schools in countries we have yet to address, in further broadening our study," said Takashi Hara, a teacher and adviser to the science club's physics and radiation division.

Fukushima Daiichi still looms large in local people's life

April 6, 2016

Despite all the misery, nuclear facility vital part of people's lives

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201604060001.html>

By SAWAAKI HIKITA/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the second installment of a three-part series on conditions that contract workers face at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

* * *

For those living in coastal areas of Fukushima Prefecture, the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant is a bit like the proverbial elephant in the living room, in that it looms large in their lives.

Although the plant unleashed untold havoc five years ago, many people find it unsettling to badmouth the site to which they have owed their economic well-being--even after the disaster.

Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s sprawling nuclear complex provided them with coveted employment that made the difference between making do and doing without in an otherwise depressed local economy.

One local resident, a onetime fisherman, summed up the thoughts of people in the area by saying: "You cannot deny having a sense of gratitude if you have lived in this coastal region. It is not a question of like or dislike."

Born in a community close to the crash of waves, the man aspired from an early age to become a fisherman.

He loved the sea so much that he even stopped attending high school for several months to work on a boat trawling for Pacific saury.

He eventually quit high school to make his living by fishing full-time.

Local fishermen can be away from home for months at a time, traveling to distant parts of the globe and danger. The longest time the man had been away was 10 months.

He recalled fishing for squid off Argentina shortly after the Falkland War ended in 1982 and witnessing a ship coming under fire and sinking because the vessel had intruded into the country's territorial waters.

He began a stint at the Fukushima plant in around 1972, about a year after the plant opened. Although he was a full-time fisherman, the man sought to supplement his income when it was off-season for fishing.

As prices for fish continued to stagnate, he eventually quit fishing altogether in 1989 to become a full-time worker at the Fukushima plant.

Ever since, his life revolved around his work at the site--until the disaster triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

After a break of a couple of months in the aftermath of the triple meltdown, the man returned to the plant to work on ventilation equipment at a reactor building.

He was hired by a construction company based near the crippled facility.

Back in the 1970s, the man recalled that subcontractors were lax about the handling of radioactive materials.

"Workers did not follow the set rules as strictly as today," he said.

They occasionally disposed of pipes and other radioactive waste generated at reactor buildings manually, although they were expected to use a machine for the task.

His responsibility also involved checking pipes for cracks.

To detect a flaw in piping, it was a standard procedure then, as it is now, to conduct a liquid penetrant test. Workers paint pipes with a red solution and wipe them after a while.

The penetrant remains inside the damaged parts. Workers then coat the pipes with “developing fluid,” which is a mixture of highly volatile liquid such as thinner and some sort of white powder.

Red stains left in the flawed sections emerge in the process so that workers can identify parts that need to be repaired.

However, they would skip making needed repairs when they feared they would not be able to meet the deadline for the work they had been assigned to do.

“We deliberately did not paint red penetrant to the parts that we knew were damaged,” he recalled.

The man said his crew had no choice.

“The contractor told us to make out a report for all the mistakes we made, but we knew we would be better off not doing so because we would be certainly slapped with a penalty for the errors we would have reported,” he said. “As long as the nature of relations between a contractor and a subcontractor remained that of a higher and lower rung of a pyramid, attempts to cover up oversight were bound to continue.”

When the magnitude-9.0 earthquake struck, the man was in the basement of a reactor building.

An inspection was under way at the time to check whether the replacement of parts he had just finished was done properly.

The man heard metallic clanks from a floor above as if two huge objects had collided with each other.

He was desperate to flee right away, but could not. The stairs were shaking so violently that he was unable to climb them. The man was only able to climb ladders and reach safety after the vibrations had subsided. Ensuing tsunami swept into the compound, but did not reach the office where he took refuge.

He managed to return home that night.

Later, he learned that the last people to leave the plant were engineers who handled valves.

These were the men who knew exactly which direction water will flow when a particular pipe valve was opened.

“All of us hired by a contractor and subcontractors remained on-site after the other workers had left,” a valve engineer told him.

The man returned to work at the plant around May 2011.

The company initially stated that the men would not have to work at the plant. But one day, the president of the company summoned them to a canteen and apologetically told them they had to.

“It is far from my intention to accept work at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, but I would be out of a job if we refused,” he said. “I am sorry to have to say this, but I registered you as reserve workers for the plant.”

The president said executives of a contractor had assembled the presidents of subcontractors to ask them to secure manpower for the plant.

One of the presidents demanded an extra allowance for the radiation risks in return.

“The current terms and conditions are unacceptable,” the president said. “We request you provide more hazard pay.”

Then one of the executives of the contractor declared: “We will not partner with a subcontractor that puts money first.”

Some subcontractors went along with the contractor, including the man’s company, while others refused. When he was a full-time fisherman, the man and his peers were opposed to the plant.

“We believed that warm, discharged water from the plant would cause a change in the ecosystem in waters nearby,” he said.

Still, it was the nuclear power plant that provided him with a job to make a living over nearly four decades.

"Subcontractors have heavily relied on work at the plant as a source of their revenues before and even after the accident," he said. "Thanks to the contracts with the plant, some companies grew into larger ones and others succeeded in improving their technological skills."

Environment minister in no-entry zone

April 10, 2016

Marukawa visits Fukushima no-entry zone

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160409_25/

Japan's Environment Minister Tamayo Marukawa has visited a no-entry zone in Fukushima Prefecture, where workers are still clearing the environment of radioactive fallout.

Marukawa on Saturday traveled to the Yonomori District in Tomioka Town, near the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The district has a 2.5-kilometer row of cherry trees that are in full bloom. But it remains a government-designated no-go area, with high radiation levels that will make it hard for people to return for a long time. So far workers have only decontaminated some parts of such zones.

The government says it plans to review the status of evacuation zones around the plant by summer as radiation levels in some areas have fallen. It will also decide how far to extend the full-scale decontamination job.

Marukawa said the clean-up operation is pivotal to the revival of towns in the area. She indicated that the government will consult local officials on the planning.

Strong aftershocks expected

Scientists warn of strong aftershocks

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160415_04/

Scientists at Japan's Meteorological Agency warn of relatively strong aftershocks that are expected to occur during the next several days.

Gen Aoki of the agency said at a news conference on Thursday night that people in stricken areas should

be prepared for the possible collapse of buildings and landslides. He added the aftershocks could have intensities of up to 6-minus on the Japanese scale.

He also said the agency believes Thursday's quake occurred near a fault that caused major earthquakes several times in the past.

As for Mount Aso, a volcano near the epicenter, agency officials say instruments haven't detected any change in its activity after the earthquake.

Monument to dead cattle

April 15, 2016

Fukushima ranchers honor dead cattle from nuke disaster

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201604150102.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

TOMIOKA, Fukushima Prefecture--About 170 cattlemen gathered here on April 15 to dedicate a monument to beef cattle that died from starvation or had to be euthanized as a result of the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

According to a local livestock cooperative, cattle farming was thriving in the coastal area of Fukushima Prefecture before the disaster unfolded at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant on March 11, 2011. Nobuo Nemoto, head of the cooperative, which is based in Futaba, a town that co-hosts the stricken nuclear plant, said he and other cattle farmers will work hard to revive the industry.

"We are facing enormous difficulties, including the aging of farmers and a dent in morale in resuming the industry," he said. "Despite that, we are hoping to make a fresh start with the ceremony to unveil the monument."

Although many cattlemen were forced to evacuate and leave their livestock behind, many returned to their farms on occasion to feed and take care of their animals.

But after the government set up a 20-kilometer no-entry zone around the plant on April 22, 2011, the number of cattle that died of starvation on farms near the plant increased dramatically.

The no-entry zone was established to prohibit evacuees and others from entering the area due to high levels of radioactive substances.

The government then instructed the cattle ranchers to have their starving animals euthanized after gaining their consent. By February 2014, about 1,700 head of beef cattle--primarily cows and their calves--were put out of their misery.

Still looking for survivors in Fukushima

April 13, 2016

Fukushima man still digging for remains of family lost to tsunami

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160413/p2a/00m/0na/029000c>

FUKUSHIMA -- For Takayuki Ueno, 43, whose father and son were never found after being lost to the tsunami that followed the Great East Japan Earthquake, moving forward after the tragedy has not been an option.

Nearly every weekend, he comes to the beach to dig for their remains.

"I am hoping to find even just one bone fragment," he murmurs. "If I don't make an effort, there's no possibility of finding them. But if I do try, there is always that chance."

Ueno's 63-year-old father, 60-year-old mother, 8-year-old daughter, and 3-year-old son were caught in the tsunami at their home in the city of Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, on March 11, 2011.

With no police officers or Japan Self Defense Force personnel present due to the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, Ueno began searching for his family together with firefighter friends of his.

He found the bodies of more than 40 people he knew -- along with those of his mother and daughter. To date, however, he has still not located his father or his son.

Ueno's wife, who was pregnant at the time of the disaster, evacuated outside of the prefecture -- and was therefore unable to attend her daughter's cremation ceremony.

Reaching out for volunteers via Facebook in the summer of 2011, Ueno created a volunteer search group that he called the "reconstruction beach team." Through this action, he was able to meet other survivors who were searching for their missing relatives -- thereby expanding the scope of his initiative.

The search crew sorted through the wreckage of homes and cars along the coastal areas designated as "difficult-to-return" zones due to radiation contamination, prompting Ueno to ask pointedly, "When government officials say that 'reconstruction is proceeding steadily,' just what areas are they referring to?"

Ueno's source of emotional support has been his wife, 39, and his 4-year-old daughter, who was born after the disaster.

But he is haunted by a lingering thought: "I was unable to protect my children. As a father, I failed."

At one point, Ueno even believed that after he found his son's remains, he would kill himself. But then another idea suddenly crossed his mind: "My son likely arranged it so that I wouldn't find him in order that I would go on living."

It was at this point that he made the decision to choose life.

Hoping to transform into joy the countless tears that have spilled onto his land, Ueno plans to create a maze of field mustard flowers in front of his home this spring -- and to set off fireworks this summer on the beach to honor the hard work of his team.

Ueno worked at an agricultural cooperative before the disaster, but he quit in order to devote himself to the search effort. He now also farms, and earns his living from jobs including clearing away rubble.

More than 2,500 people remain missing in the three prefectures affected by the disaster -- and Ueno plans to continue working to help find them for as long as his physical condition allows.

"As survivors," he says, "this is our responsibility."

Preparedness key to survival after mega disasters

EDITORIAL: Mega-disasters possible as this latest massive quake shows

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201604160037.html>

April 16, 2016 at 14:45 JST

The severe earthquake that rocked the southern prefecture of Kumamoto on April 14 caused major damage and scared a lot of people.

Numerous homes collapsed due to the violent shaking. In cities and towns, pedestrians were transfixed as they tried to get to grips with this latest natural disaster.

The quake reminded some people of the Great East Japan Earthquake that struck five years ago, while others were concerned about the safety of Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai nuclear power plant in neighboring Kagoshima Prefecture. The plant's No. 1 and No. 2 reactors are the only ones currently in operation in Japan.

The magnitude-6.5 earthquake in Kyushu had a maximum intensity of 7 on the Japanese seismic scale in Mashiki, a town of 35,000 or so souls near the epicenter.

In Kumamoto itself, tiles cascaded from the roof of the main tower of 400-year-old Kumamoto Castle and several ancient stone walls there crumpled. A 100-meter section of the 242-meter "Nagabei" (long wall), a designated important cultural property, collapsed.

It was the first earthquake of such intensity to strike since the 2011 temblor in northeastern Japan that generated devastating tsunami and the Fukushima nuclear calamity. Many Japanese, with the exception of residents affected by the big earthquake five years ago, seem to be becoming less conscious of the risk of a major seismic event occurring.

We need to remain keenly aware that nowhere in the Japanese archipelago is spared the danger of earthquakes. Any earthquake, even one in a remote area, should be taken as a warning not to take safety for granted.

We urge everybody to pay serious attention to this latest event and carefully prepare for major quakes in the future, while helping where they can in providing disaster relief to affected areas and supporting recovery efforts.

RESCUE OPERATIONS 1ST PRIORITY

The death toll from the Kumamoto earthquake as of late April 15 stood at nine. Most of the victims are believed to have been trapped under collapsed buildings.

Self-Defense Forces personnel and members of Emergency Fire Response teams rushed to the quake-hit areas to begin rescue operations. First and foremost, all-out efforts must be made to search for and rescue survivors while considering the risk of a secondary disaster.

One notable fact is that the quake has been followed by unusually frequent and strong aftershocks.

The Japan Meteorological Agency warned that aftershocks measuring up to lower 6 on the Japanese seismic scale could occur in the next week or so.

Quakes of this intensity can cause weak wooden buildings to collapse and trigger massive landslides.

For the time being, local residents should avoid acting alone and stay away from damaged buildings or steep slopes.

More than 40,000 people took temporary shelter following the quake and many are still staying in community centers, schools and other makeshift facilities. Some survivors laid cardboard sheets on the ground to sit on.

It is still chilly in the morning and at night. Rain could add to the misery of survivors. Proper attention should be paid to the health of those in the affected areas.

VIOLENT QUAKES AND ACTIVE FAULTS

This is the fourth time Japan has been hit by a quake registering 7 on the seismic scale since the meteorological agency assigned that number to the maximum intensity of quakes in 1949.

The previous three are the Great Hanshin Earthquake, which flattened Kobe in January 1995 and had a magnitude of 7.3, the magnitude-6.8 Niigata Prefecture Chuetsu Earthquake in October 2004 and the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011, which had a magnitude of 9.0.

An earthquake's energy doubles when its magnitude increases by 0.2 and becomes 1,000 times more powerful when the figure rises by 2.

Among the four severest quakes since 1949, only the 2011 temblor was a so-called ocean-trench earthquake, one caused by the shift of tectonic plates. The 2011 quake released enormous energy, some 360 times larger than the force of the Hanshin quake.

The other three were linked to active faults, or fractures within the Earth's crust.

This type of earthquake releases less energy than ocean-trench quakes, with only limited areas shaken violently. Because the focus of such quakes is relatively close to the surface, however, areas right above the area hit tend to suffer severe damage.

The focus of the April 14 quake is close to the Futagawa fault belt and the Hinagu fault belt, which have been designated by the government's Earthquake Research Committee as "major fault belts."

The committee had predicted that a movement of part of these fault systems could cause an earthquake with a magnitude of between 6.8 and 7.5. If the entire system moves, the panel warned, a gigantic quake with a magnitude of between 7.5 and 8.2 could occur.

The committee had also said the probability of a major quake linked to these fault belts occurring within 30 years is relatively high.

The Kumamoto earthquake was smaller in scale than predicted. But the fact is that it produced shaking of a maximum intensity level on the seismic scale and caused loss of life even though the amount of energy it released was about one-16th of the force of the Hanshin quake.

The Japanese archipelago is crisscrossed with active faults. Some seismologists have argued that the Great East Japan Earthquake has ushered in a new era of increased and intensified seismic activity in Japan.

Other experts say there are many active faults still to be discovered.

Even residents of areas without known active faults, let alone people living near recognized faults, should be adequately prepared for major quakes.

PREPARATION KEY TO SURVIVAL

Kyushu has been regarded as less conscious of the risk of big quakes than it should be.

Six months after the March 2011 earthquake, the education board of Mashiki invited a seismologist to deliver a lecture for the town's residents. The board tried to make local residents aware of the possibility of an earthquake with a magnitude of up to 8 occurring directly below their town and understand that enhancing the quake resistance of their homes is the most effective way to prepare for such events.

But only 70 percent of the houses in the town have been made quake-resistant, a lower ratio than the average for the entire prefecture.

Last year, the Tokyo metropolitan government distributed a booklet on dealing with a disaster to all 6.7 million or so households in the capital.

The booklet contains a broad range of information useful for efforts to become better prepared for disasters, such as a safety checklist for homes and advice for responding to quakes, like “Don’t rush down to the first floor if you are in an old building.” The booklet also offers tips for post-disaster life, such as a list of goods that should be reserved for emergencies including plastic wrap, which proved very useful in past disasters, and an illustration of how to make diapers with plastic grocery bags.

The booklet has been well received because of its useful and specific content.

The difficulty of rescue and relief operations following a powerful quake, say one measuring 7 on the seismic scale, for instance, is far greater if wider areas are affected.

The fact we all should keep in mind is this: **The effectiveness of responses to quakes, especially big ones, depends, to a great extent, on how well local residents and households are prepared in ordinary times.**

Takahama restart: Safety concerns growing

April 21, 2016

Fears grow as Takahama reactors near restart

Staff Writer

Kansai Electric Power Co.’s Takahama No. 1 and 2 reactors are over 40 years old, but the utility has applied for a 20-year extension. On Wednesday, the Nuclear Regulation Authority officially gave the reactors the green light, signaling they meet the fundamental safety standards needed for reactivation. Although additional tests and inspections are needed before the reactors can resume operation, the potential first-ever restart of two units that are more than four decades old has neighboring communities worried.

The Sea of Japan coastal city of Maizuru, Kyoto Prefecture, parts of which lie 5 km from Takahama, would be on the front lines of any disaster response in the event of an accident, and Mayor Ryoza Tatami expressed specific concerns Wednesday.

“At present, has the safety of the plant been confirmed? We need scientific and technological explanations. The No. 1 and 2 reactors were envisioned and constructed to operate for 40 years,” Tatami said. “We also need documentation from when the plant was originally built that proves it’s possible to operate the reactor for 60 years, especially since the core cannot be replaced.”

Caution by Tatami in particular over restarting Takahama Nos. 1 and 2 could impact the stance of other Kansai leaders.

A small part of northern Shiga Prefecture lies within 30 km of Takahama, and Gov. Taizo Mikazuki expressed concern this week about running old reactors that could leak radiation into Lake Biwa, as well as the problem of storing additional nuclear waste generated by the reactors.

While gaining approval for restarts from heavily pro-nuclear Takahama and Fukui Prefecture is expected to be relatively easy, Kepco is certain to face calls from other Kansai-area prefectures to provide detailed explanations of why it needs to restart two aging reactors before permission for their restart is given. It is also likely to face questions about whether the utility and NRA are cutting corners in order to make the July 7 deadline for formal permission to restart. If that deadline is missed, the reactors are supposed to be scrapped.

More damages for TEPCO

April 28, 2016

TEPCO must pay 31 million yen damages over evacuee deaths

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201604280048.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

April 28, 2016 at 15:55 JST

A court ordered Tokyo Electric Power Co. to pay 31 million yen (\$279,279) in damages to be split among the families of two elderly men who died after being evacuated from a hospital following the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

The plaintiffs had demanded a total of 66.4 million yen in compensation, but Presiding Judge Tetsuro Nakayoshi at the Tokyo District Court agreed with TEPCO in an April 27 ruling that factors other than the nuclear accident also contributed to the untimely deaths.

Tadashi Abe, 98, and Yoshio Henmi, 73, were hospitalized at Futaba Hospital in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, which is 4.6 kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant where disaster struck following a blackout triggered by the powerful quake and tsunami of March 11, 2011.

Abe was rescued from the hospital March 14 by Self-Defense Forces members, but he died two days later at a makeshift evacuation center in the prefecture.

Henmi was evacuated from the hospital March 16 to be moved to another hospital. He died that day.

“(The two) died from the burden of being forced to travel for a long distance and for an extended period of time after the nuclear accident,” said a lawyer representing the plaintiffs.

Abe had to travel about 230 kilometers in eight hours while Henmi was ferried about 80 kilometers, according to court documents.

But the court ruled less damages should be awarded as the deaths were partly caused by hypothermia that was contracted due to the lack of heating after the power outage caused by the quake and tsunami. About 50 people who were left behind at the hospital and affiliated nursing facility had died by the end of April because their evacuation was delayed.

The court's ruling was the first in connection with lawsuits filed against TEPCO by relatives of seven people who died or went missing in the aftermath of the disaster.

A 73-year-old sister-in-law of Henmi voiced relief after the court decision.

“I finally got something that was bothering me off my chest,” she said. “I regret letting him die such a lonely death.”

Fumio Shinkai, a lawyer representing the plaintiffs, however, expressed frustration over the ruling.

“It is regrettable that the ruling did not take into account peculiarities of a nuclear accident,” he said at a news conference.

The lawyers argued that the court should give consideration to damages stemming from a nuclear power plant, which was believed to be safe prior to the accident, and the sufferings they went through while evacuating.

Shinkai noted that the ruling did not refer to those points they had argued in court and that the amount of damages the district court ordered is similar to that of a fatal traffic accident.

TEPCO said in a statement: "We offer heart-felt prayers to those who died after they were forced to evacuate in the wake of the nuclear accident. After studying the court decision, we will continue to respond sincerely."

When the nuclear accident unfolded, there were 338 patients at the hospital. On March 12, when a hydrogen explosion occurred at the nuclear facility, 209 patients who were able to walk on their own were transported by bus to evacuation centers and other facilities.

(This article was compiled from reports by Odaka Chiba and Mana Nagano.)

Remaining indoors after nuclear disaster not realistic

May 2, 2016

Questions raised over nuclear evacuation plans urging residents to remain indoors

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160502/p2a/00m/0na/021000c>

Residents living in areas hosting Japan's nuclear power plants are voicing concerns about nuclear accident evacuation plans following two recent deadly earthquakes in Kumamoto Prefecture registering a maximum 7 on the Japanese intensity scale.

- **【Kumamoto Earthquake Special】**

The government's evacuation plans are based on the premise of some residents near nuclear plants initially remaining indoors, and having them flee to other prefectures if necessary. But questions have been raised over how effective current plans would be in the event of disasters like those that hit Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant in March 2011.

"If there were a nuclear accident, remaining indoors would be impossible. The Kumamoto Earthquake has made me even more anxious," said Ikue Yamaguchi, a 34-year-old public servant raising two children in the Kagoshima Prefecture city of Ichikikushikino. Her home is just around 15 kilometers away from the No. 1 and 2 reactors at the Sendai Nuclear Power Plant in Satsumasendai in the prefecture. The reactors are the only ones currently operating in Japan.

Before the Fukushima nuclear disaster, areas within 8 to 10 kilometer radii of nuclear power plants were designated as being subject to evacuation plans, but after the outbreak of the disaster, the areas were expanded to a 30 kilometer radius. As a result, 135 municipalities in 21 prefectures are now subject to such plans, compared with 45 municipalities in 15 prefectures before the disaster. Altogether, some 4.8 million people, or about 4 percent of the population, are subject to such evacuation plans.

Under government evacuation plans, those living within 5 kilometers of a nuclear power plant are supposed to be evacuated immediately if there are signs of a nuclear accident, while those living 5 to 30 kilometers away are to remain indoors, and then evacuate further away if there are signs that radiation levels are increasing. The Nuclear Regulation Authority says that radiation exposure can be sufficiently reduced in areas between 5 and 30 kilometers from a nuclear power plant by remaining indoors. It adds

that if people in those areas go out of their way to evacuate, they could face a heightened risk of radiation exposure and health damage.

But in the case of an earthquake like the temblors that recently struck Kumamoto Prefecture, which left many homes in danger of collapsing, it would be difficult to remain indoors. And not all shelters offer stable protection, either. As of the end of March last year, 85.7 percent of public facilities in Kagoshima Prefecture supposed to be used as shelters during disasters had been reinforced against earthquakes -- a figure lower than the national average of 88.3 percent. Ehime Prefecture, which hosts Shikoku Electric Power Co.'s Ikata Nuclear Power Plant that is expected to be reactivated in late July, has the nation's third worst rate, at 79.1 percent.

If an accident were to occur at the Sendai Nuclear Power Plant in Kagoshima Prefecture, then according to estimates, it could take up to around 29 hours to evacuate some 210,000 people living within a 30 kilometer radius of the plant who would be subject to evacuation. This, however, is based on the premise of people living in areas within 5 to 30 kilometers of the plant initially remaining indoors -- if everyone were to start evacuating at once, then it is predicted that transportation networks would become congested, and evacuation would take even longer.

"Even if we were to evacuate indoors, then we would have to go outside (to receive supplies, etc.) and wouldn't be able to avoid exposure to radiation," Yamaguchi says. "I would want to evacuate immediately, but evacuation routes would probably be crowded."

Shunro Iwata, an official at the nuclear safety control division of the Kagoshima Prefectural Government, commented, "When evacuating indoors, people are not forbidden from going outside, so they can go out if the need arises. There would be no immediate effect on health (for radiation levels below the standard reading). We are not in a position to revise plans, and there is no change to the fact that this is the most reasonable approach at present."

Naoya Sekiya, a specially appointed associate professor at the University of Tokyo who is familiar with evacuation plans during disasters, said it is not realistic to base evacuation plans on the premise of people remaining indoors.

"Evacuation plans should be made with the presumption of a major earthquake cutting off roads and railways. If evacuation orders are issued to people within a five-kilometer radius of a nuclear plant, then obviously people in surrounding areas will start evacuating, too, resulting in further confusion. An evacuation plan based on the premise of people remaining indoors is not realistic," he said.

(Radioactive) wild boars flourishing in Fukushima

April 11, 2016

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/04/11/thousands-of-radioactive-boars-are-overrunning-farmland-in-fukushima/>

Thousands of radioactive boars are overrunning farmland in Fukushima

Nuclear catastrophe is always an unmitigated disaster. The only beneficiaries, albeit in a perverse fashion, are animals, which tend to flourish in areas humans evacuate. This has certainly been the case for wild boars around Fukushima, which have multiplied so rapidly, they've become a problem for neighboring towns.

On Friday, March 11, 2011, a 9.0 magnitude earthquake struck offshore near Tokyo and caused a 30-foot high tsunami that crashed into Japan's coast, killing 18,000 people, according to The Washington Post. Water poured into the Tokyo Electric Power Company's Fukushima Daichi nuclear power plant, flooding the generators designed to keep the plant's reactors cool. Later that day, an explosion rocked the plant, and more than 200,000 residents living within 12 miles were evacuated as radioactive material began leaking into the surrounding land. In the ensuing days, two more explosions shook the plant, and several fires broke out.

It was a true nuclear meltdown.

Since 2011, no humans have been able to live on the poisoned land. Wild boars, meanwhile, have thrived heartily. No evidence suggests that the radioactive contamination harms the beasts, and the lack of people there to hunt them has allowed them to breed with abandon.

Boars aren't the only animal to flourish in the wake of nuclear disaster, as Sarah Kaplan reported in the Post in October. Following the Chernobyl catastrophe, elks, wolves, bears and lynx flourished without humans around to hunt them. Ten years after the meltdown, "every animal population in the exclusion zone had at least doubled."

"That wildlife started increasing when humans abandoned the area in 1986 is not earth-shattering news," Tom Hinton, a radio-ecology expert who has studied the aftermath of Chernobyl told *The Washington Post*. "What's surprising here was the life was able to increase even in an area that is among the most radioactively contaminated in the world."

It's increasingly problematic for the residents, particularly farmers, living nearby.

Since the meltdown, **the damage wild boars have caused to agriculture by eating crops in the Fukushima area has doubled**, reaching ¥98 million or just more than \$900,000, according to Yomiuri. That price tag will only rise as the boar population, lacking natural predators, continues to increase—during the past two years, the number of boars that have been hunted has increased more than 300 percent, from 3,000 to 13,000.

Normally, boar meat is highly desired in Japan—in fact, *The Japan Times* called pork "the nation's most popular meat"—but these animals have been eating contaminated plants and small animals in the power plant's "exclusion zone." *The Sunday Times* reports recent tests have found high levels of caesium-137 in the area, which has a half-life of 30 years.

These animals are unfit for human consumption, which presents another problem: hunters can attempt to reduce the population, but they have to do something with the carcasses. According to Texas A&M wildlife and fisheries professor Billy Higginbotham, the average size of a male hog is around 200 pounds. Considering this average, if 13,000 are killed, hunters have around 2,600,000 pounds of potentially dangerous flesh requiring disposal.

There are few solutions.

The city of Nihonmatsu, 35 miles from the plant, contains three mass graves. Each one can hold around 600 boars, but they're nearly full, and the city's run out of space to dig new graves.

Morning Mix newsletter

Stories that will be the talk of the morning.

"Sooner or later, we're going to have to ask local people to give us their land to use," Tsuneo Saito, a local boar hunter, told *The Sunday Times*. "The city doesn't own land which isn't occupied by houses."

Some hunters have attempted to bury these bodies in their own yards, only to have them dug back up by dogs.

The best solution would be incinerating the bodies, which requires a special facility that can filter out radioactive materials to prevent the resulting smoke from blanketing nearby areas and contaminating

them. One such facility exists in the city of Soma, but the \$1.4 million crematorium's capacity is severely limited. It can only handle three boars a day (or 21 a week, which is only 1,092 each year; not quite 13,000).

This isn't the first time the world has battled with radioactive boars. In 2014, *The Telegraph* reported that one in three boars (297 of 752 tested animals) found near the German state of Saxony contained levels of radiation so high, they were unfit for human consumption. This was believed to be a result of the Chernobyl disaster, which occurred 28 years prior and 700 miles from Saxony.

The battle between animals and humans has long raged, but for farmers living near the exclusion zone of Fukushima, it's become a matter of economic survival.

Reopening a fish shop in Fukushima

May 6, 2016

Fish store operators in Fukushima to reopen shop for the love of it

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160506/p2a/00m/0na/012000c>

MINAMISOMA, Fukushima -- **In the hopes of bringing people back to their hometown**, fish shop owners Shigeichi Yachi, 68, and his wife Michiko, 64, will return from temporary housing to reopen their store here in the beginning of June for the first time since the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

The Yachi Fish Shop, which is located near JR Odaka Station in the city's Odaka Ward, will be the only such business in the city, as no fish stores have been in operation following the long-term evacuation of city residents due to the nuclear disaster that occurred five years ago.

On one recent day, Shigeichi drove his pickup truck to a temporary housing facility in the city's Kashima Ward. Stopping in front of each individual unit, he called out, "Fish, here!"

One elderly woman emerged from her doorway, murmuring as she perused the offerings in the refrigerator of the truck bed, "My husband died last year, and since then I've lost my enthusiasm for cooking. Lately, I haven't been eating much."

Looking at Shigeichi, she then added, "Hey, your belly has been getting a bit rounder, hasn't it?"

"Yeah, around here they call me the fat evacuee," he shot back. "But you know, calories are not a bad thing."

A smile crossed the woman's face at the straightforward banter. Purchasing some marbled flounder and boiled beans that Shigeichi had recommended to her, she asked him, "When are you coming next?"

Shigeichi first began his sales of fish to the temporary housing residents in July 2011. After initially evacuating to Tochigi Prefecture in March 2011 when evacuation orders were issued following the nuclear accident, he later moved to temporary housing in Kashima Ward, which was outside of the zone stipulated for evacuation, and is located near the nursing home where his mother lived.

In the beginning, he restricted his sales to people he already knew who had evacuated from Odaka. He was, he says, also uneasy at first, with respect to local fish shop owners with businesses near the temporary housing unit.

Many of the temporary housing residents were people from coastal regions who had lost their homes to the tsunami, however, and after a while, Kashima residents started telling him that they wanted to buy his fish.

Now, five years after the disaster, some of Shigeichi's customers are those who have left the temporary housing and rebuilt their own homes in the city.

Every morning, he goes to get fish from a market in the city of Soma, and visits 25 different locations with his pickup truck before evening.

Repairs to the building that houses the Yachis' home and business began at the end of March, and are expected to conclude shortly.

The shop will no longer resume selling to previous customers such as Japanese-style inns, which formerly ordered fish for hundreds of customers at a time. Instead, its base of business will be those elderly residents who are expected to return after evacuation orders for the city have been lifted in June.

Shigeichi says that he also plans to take custom orders such as delivering pre-grilled or stewed fish for customers who should so desire. And with Shigeichi handling the deliveries and Michiko taking care of the shop, the business truly is going to be a two-person effort.

However, he says, he feels no pressure. "It's going to be hard to make a profit -- but if we stay in the red, I don't really mind."

For Shigeichi, who represents the third generation of the family business -- which his grandfather started during the war -- the image of his parents working as hard as they could in order to raise him and his four younger brothers is etched into his memory.

"If I am not working, I cannot relax," he says.

"Some people from Odaka died in the tsunami," he adds. "And when I think of it that way, I know that this fish business is going to be my life's work -- regardless of whether or not it turns a profit."

He smiles, and his wife nods quietly beside him.

140-year old school must close



Graduates and local residents attend the last athletic meet at Iwaisawa Elementary School in Tamura, Fukushima Prefecture, on May 14. (Yosuke Fukudome)

May 14, 2016

School to close in Fukushima as too few children able to attend

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201605140036.html>

By TAKESHI SUZUKI/ Staff Writer

TAMURA, Fukushima Prefecture--Despite a proud 140-year history, the Iwaisawa Elementary School here has to close--as not enough children come to classes any more due to the 2011 nuclear disaster.

The school held its last annual athletic meet on May 14. It will merge with another school after this academic year ends next March.

The school currently has 19 pupils, down from 52 before the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

In the lead-up to the athletic meet, the school, located in the Miyakoji district of Tamura, Fukushima Prefecture, sent out about 500 invitation letters to its graduates and local residents. About 150 people turned up.

After the nuclear accident, residents in the district were forced to evacuate to other areas. Although the evacuation order was lifted in April 2014, many of them opted to stay where they were while keeping their resident registries in the district.

As of the end of April this year, 2,564 people were officially registered as residents in the district. But of that number, only 1,600 or so actually lived there.

After the nuclear accident, pupils at Iwaisawa Elementary School temporarily took classes using classrooms of a different school in central Tamura, which had been already closed. In April 2014, they returned to their original school.

But only 29 came back, compared with the pre-accident figure of 52. The number has since further declined to 19. Because of that, it was decided the school will be merged with another school next spring.

All clean

May 15, 2016

Fukushima river fish business plots revival after spotless tests

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/05/15/national/fukushima-river-fish-business-plots-revival-after-spotless-tests/#.VzgsjORdeov>

Fukushima Minpo

River fish distributor Yoshida Suisan in the town of Miyakoji, Fukushima Prefecture, is back in business shipping char, trout and rainbow trout for the first time in five years since the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake kicked off the core meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

"I want people to eat delicious river fish from Miyakoji," said Eimitsu Yoshida, the company's third president, who is plunging back into business after monthly radiation tests on the fish came out clean. Yoshida Suisan was established in 1964 in Iwaisawa, formerly in the village of Miyakoji. Setting up a processing plant near the headquarters and a nursery each in Higashifurumichi and Kotakizawa, the company cultivated and sold freshwater fish. Before the 2011 mega-quake, its annual output was 40 tons. It shipped 4 million fish, including fresh fish, minnows and processed fish.

The hatcheries in Higashifurumichi and Kotakizawa are about 15 km from the Fukushima No. 1 plant. The area became part of the radioactive no-go zone. About 600,000 fish raised by the distributor all died since it could not feed and manage the water quality. The earthquake also damaged the concrete facilities.

After the quake, Yoshida worked as a salaried employee for 2½ years. Restarting his fish business, he feels happy and realizes the importance of cultivating freshwater life.

But Yoshida was worried about the high costs of restarting the business and unfounded rumors that might prevent people from buying local fish. Not being able to decide whether to resume or close the business, he found that the reconstruction costs would be aided by subsidies by the prefecture, which prodded him to restart operations. In April 2014, when the evacuation order for the eastern part of Miyakoji was lifted, he made the decision to start over.

Last August, Yoshida finished building new fish hatcheries in the same places as the previous ones. Soon after that, he cultivated 900,000 char, trout and rainbow trout. Tests conducted on the river fish once a month all said no amounts of radiation were detectable. He began large-scale shipments last month.

The youth section of Miyakoji's commerce and industry association plans to promote the Miyakoji name by providing line-caught char this year.

"I want to fight against rumors and restore sales to their level before the earthquake. I also hope I can contribute to my hometown, Miyakoji," said Yoshida, who also acts as leader of the associations's youth section.

Yoshida Suisan char and trout are available at a fishing center in Takine in the city of Tamura. For more information, call 0247-75-3189.

This section, appearing every third Monday, features topics and issues covered by the Fukushima Minpo, the largest newspaper in Fukushima Prefecture. The original article was published on May 1.

Minamisoma City: Evacuation order lifted in July

May 13, 2016

Evacuation orders for Minamisoma City to be lifted

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160513_11/

NHK has learned that the Japanese government plans to lift evacuation orders for Minamisoma City, near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, in July.

Sources say the government is set to convey its decision to the city assembly on Friday.

The city's southern and western regions are still subject to evacuation orders, affecting about 11,700 people. The figure is the largest among municipalities around the plant where evacuation orders have been or will be lifted.

The government says decontamination work is complete in residential areas and that the regions' environment is ready for residents to return.

The government hopes to lift the orders before a traditional summer festival in the Soma district in late July that features samurai on horseback.

The government plans to set a firm date after hearing the opinions of residents at an explanatory meeting that begins on Sunday.

In the wake of the 2011 nuclear accident, evacuation orders were issued at one time for 11 municipalities in the prefecture.

The order for Naraha Town, which had been totally evacuated, was lifted last September. The orders for Katsurao Town and Kawauchi Village will be lifted next month.

Expert Govt. agency badly needed to manage disasters

May 15, 2016

LDP proposes agency to handle disasters

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160515_09/

Japan's main governing Liberal Democratic Party says there is a need to secure personnel with expertise in disaster management, with a view to setting up a government agency.

An LDP working team has been studying the government's initial actions 5 years ago when a massive earthquake and tsunami hit northeastern Japan.

In its report, the team evaluates the government's quick response to the disaster based on lessons learned from the 1995 quake that devastated Kobe and nearby areas.

But it says **the government was not able to collect necessary information from Tokyo Electric Power Company at the time of the nuclear accident in Fukushima.**

The report says that this caused a delay in supporting people who had to evacuate the area.

The report also urges the government to establish a backup system for Tokyo's function as the nation's capital in case the city is hit by a giant quake.

The report refers to the recent powerful earthquakes in the southwestern city of Kumamoto. It says that in some cases aid distribution was not effective due to the lack of information about evacuees and shelters.

It calls for **better cooperation between the central government, municipalities and the private sector.**

The LDP plans to submit the report to the government soon.

Questions raised about Japanese emergency handling

U.S. expert questions if Japan applying 2011 lessons at Kumamoto

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160514/p2g/00m/0dm/067000c>

May 14, 2016 (Mainichi Japan)

NEW YORK (Kyodo) -- A former U.S. government expert on emergency management has questioned whether Japan is applying the lessons from the 2011 massive earthquake and tsunami in its northeast to its response to the recent temblors in Kumamoto Prefecture.

- **【Related】** Over 10,000 people still in shelters 1 month after Kumamoto quakes

Leo Bosner, 69, who worked for the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency for 29 years, is concerned that an integrated response may not have been in place in Japan for the quakes that jolted the southwestern prefecture a month ago.

"I discovered many problems" when studying "Japan's disastrous response" to the 2011 calamity and "I have not really heard of any major improvements," he told Kyodo News in a recent interview. "So I am a little concerned that these problems may be continuing."

"It is too early to make a definitive evaluation of the response to the Kumamoto disaster, but recent news headlines have indicated possible problem areas," he said, identifying such areas as questions about the use of the U.S. military's Osprey aircraft to language barriers for foreigners.

Bosner said the existence of no unified system for major disaster response in Japan could cause even the best-intended efforts to bog down.

"For example, various towns, prefectures and organizations may send food and other supplies to a disaster area, but if there is a shortage of people at the disaster site to sort out and distribute the supplies, the supplies don't get distributed to those in need in a timely manner," he said.

He also cited Japan's lack of full-time, permanent, professional disaster management staff and of a strong connection between the governmental and nongovernmental response to disasters as other big problems. "One thing to me that is a major barrier is that in the Japan government offices, people change the job every two years...so there is no time to build up an expertise," he said.

"I really think that if the Japanese government wants to do a strong job in disasters, they need to somehow establish a permanent staff who will stay involved over the years," he said.

"In Japan, because everything is so spread out in the government and not working together, in my view, it is very inefficient," he said. "I think if Japan could centralize this function more, it would be cheaper."

Bosner also proposed transferring officials in or between the central and regional governments while always working as disaster management specialists.

"My thought was, 'What if some worked in the Japan national government in Tokyo for two years as a disaster planner?' But then let's say when he rotated he would go to some other industry but would still be a disaster planner in that industry and then maybe if he rotated to a prefecture to a city, he would be a disaster planner in that prefecture or that city."

"If they did this, in about five or 10 years, Japan would have a real network of experienced disaster planners who understood the system and could work together. But right now they don't have this."

He said the United States integrated all the functions to respond to disasters into FEMA and turned a weak agency into one that properly works.

The administration of President Bill Clinton turned FEMA around, but that of George W. Bush downsized it, which backfired later when Hurricane Katrina hit the southern part of the United States in 2005.

"Under the Bush administration, very honestly, he just appointed political friends to be in charge of FEMA who did not know anything about disasters."

"So when Katrina came, they could not give the orders, they could not make the decisions, they did not know what to do. It was terrible. For those of us who worked at FEMA, it was so disappointing because we were helpless."

Bosner said that if there is "a political will" rather than increased budgets, Japan will be able to have a better system to respond to disasters just as the United States did.

"In Japan, there are plenty of people, in my view, who would be excellent for running a Japan FEMA or managing it...if the ministers of the Cabinet of the prime minister agree and say, 'We must do this'," he said. "But until they make that decision, nothing can happen."

Bosner served as an emergency management expert at FEMA from 1979 to 2008. He stayed in Japan from 2000 to 2001 studying that country's emergency management system. His current job includes being an adjunct lecturer in the Emergency Medical Systems Graduate School of Tokyo's Kokushikan University.

More questions about Japanese disaster preparedness

May 8, 2016

Media show Kumamoto was woefully ill-prepared for disabled evacuees

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2016/05/08/voices/media-show-kumamoto-woefully-ill-prepared-disabled-evacuees/#.VzgtNuRdeot>

by Michael Gillan Peckitt

As someone who scours the media in Japan for mentions of issues surrounding disability, I have been impressed by the reporting of the Kumamoto earthquakes. In the Japanese media, the issue of disability often gets overlooked, so it was heartening to see that a number of newspapers had focused on the difficulties disabled people face when disaster strikes.

However, far less heartening was the story that subsequently unfolded about Kumamoto Prefecture's pre-quake planning — or lack thereof — and post-quake measures for disabled evacuees. The Mainichi Shimbun, reporting the day after the biggest quake on the night on April 16, highlighted the situation of two people with disabilities who had to evacuate their homes and take refuge in a shelter: Kiyofumi Sakamoto, aged 66, paralyzed down the left side of his body since a brain hemorrhage, and Tomiko Baba, aged 84, who has Parkinson's.

Sakamoto, a resident of Mashiki, had to evacuate to a local elementary school. Since his adapted nursing-care bed could not be moved inside the emergency shelter, he had been sleeping on cardboard. His wife, 63-year-old Kikuko, had been changing his diapers and helping him bathe, a task made all the more difficult by the loss of electricity.

Baba had difficulty using the toilet at the shelter, since she uses a wheelchair. Baba's daughter said of her mother, "She's unstable emotionally, and seems to be unable to relax and get to sleep." The pair had to spend at least one night in a car, risking economy-class syndrome.

Sakamoto's and Baba's ordeals, it is easy to imagine, must be similar to those suffered by many of the elderly and disabled affected by the earthquake, and I applaud the Mainichi for raising awareness of this. However, even in those early stages, there were signs that things could have been planned better.

"The Kumamoto municipal government opened 10 shelters on April 16 that would be easier for individuals with disabilities to navigate, but as of April 17, only 13 people were utilizing them," the Mainichi reported. "The reason appears to be a lack of knowledge about their existence, so municipal officials are going around regular emergency shelters to inform disabled evacuees."

In an article published by The Japan Times on April 20, Tatsue Yamazaki, an associate professor of disaster nursing at Tokyo Medical University, expressed her concern about the lack of awareness on the ground in Kumamoto about the specific needs of certain groups of evacuees.

"Governments should create shelters for people with special needs, including the sick, the disabled and pregnant women," Yamasaki said, referring to so-called welfare evacuation centers — centers that local governments are required by law to designate for use by the more vulnerable members of society in the event of a disaster.

"The need for such shelters was intensively discussed after the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011, but local government officials I talked with in Kumamoto had no idea that such shelters were needed," she said.

Almost a week later, on April 26, The Japan News reported: "In Kumamoto, where the number of evacuees is highest, only 37, or 20 percent, of the 176 facilities designated as welfare evacuation centers by the city government have actually admitted these types of evacuees."

So what happened? It appears that these specially designated centers were unable to adequately serve the people they were supposed to partly, of course, due to damage caused by the quakes, but more worryingly, also because they were, prior to the quakes, already working at full capacity or lacked the staff required to offer a basic level of care.

Asked why none of its five welfare evacuation centers had taken in any elderly or disabled evacuees, a Mashiki town government worker said: “Every evacuation center is filled with general evacuees. We can’t even dispatch caretakers, and no facility is serving as a welfare evacuation center.”

As a disabled person living in Japan (who, coincidentally, is also married to a woman with a disability), I find the situation facing people with disabilities in the Kumamoto quake zone disturbing. I understand that before earthquakes occur, there is only so much you can do to prepare for them, and that it will always be a difficult task to attend to the needs of disabled people in a disaster zone. However, the scale of the apparent lack of resources to accommodate disabled people after the quakes is shocking.

Being a resident with a particular severity of disability here, I am in possession of a “physical disability certificate” — a certificate obtained by registering my disability status at my local ward welfare office. By registering, I have the right to receive certain benefits, and the first time I applied for this, I had to submit a report from a physician that confirmed my status as a disabled person — a perfectly reasonable request. I had assumed that such a rigorous process meant that the local city ward would at least have some knowledge of my needs as a disabled person, as the local welfare office has my address and information about my disability. Is it not then reasonable to expect that in the event of a major disaster, local government would at least know of the whereabouts and the specific needs of disabled people to whom local disaster relief services may have to attend — and would have prepared accordingly?

Josh Grisdale of Accessible Japan (www.accessible-japan.com) contributed to this article. Michael Gillan Peckitt is an academic living in Kobe. His e-book “Gaijin Story: Tales of a British Disabled Man in Japan” is available on Amazon. Foreign Agenda offers a forum for opinion on issues related to life in Japan. Your comments and story ideas: community@japantimes.co.jp

Growing hope (rice)



(Mainichi)

Photo Journal: Growing hope

May 20, 2016 (Mainichi Japan)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160520/p2a/00m/0na/005000c>

Farmer Mitsuo Sato, 71, center, and others prepare to plant rice in their paddies in the Kamishigeoka district of Naraha, Fukushima Prefecture, on May 20, 2016. A nuclear crisis evacuation order covering the area was lifted in September last year. Sato and other farmers began to regularly visit their land -- which is within 15 kilometers of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant -- the year after the reactor meltdowns to grow rice on an experimental basis. They managed to restart growing rice for commercial purposes this year after radioactive substances exceeding the government-set upper limit had not been detected in the test crops for four years. (Mainichi)

May 20, 2016 (Mainichi Japan)

Fukushima: What energy future?

May 19, 2016

INSIGHT: Fukushima's 'caldrons of hell' keep questions unanswered

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201605190001.html>

By TOSHIHIDE UEDA/ Senior Staff Writer



A convenience store in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, on March 12, 2016, remains as it was when the 2011 earthquake and tsunami triggered the nuclear accident. (Satoru Semba)

A convenience store in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, on March 12, 2016, remains as it was when the 2011 earthquake and tsunami triggered the nuclear accident. (Satoru Semba)

After spending slightly more than two years in the capital of Fukushima Prefecture, I was assigned to The Asahi Shimbun's Tokyo head office starting on May 1. I moved house the other day.

I had previously never been based in Fukushima, although I have long covered energy policy and a number of nuclear accidents as a reporter for the newspaper.

On April 11, 2014, shortly after I was assigned to Fukushima, I was told the words that would serve as a starting point for my news-gathering activities there. I am citing that phrase, which I quoted in a previous column, for a second time here:

"Whatever the future of nuclear power generation, it will remain essential to expand renewable energy sources to ensure a stable energy supply and to fight global warming. Fukushima Prefecture has swaths of land and a historical background for doing so.

The energy industry has always been its leading local industry. The prefecture is home to the Joban coal field, and Iwaki was a city of coal mines. Nobody will be able to change Japan unless Fukushima takes it upon itself to do the task."

The remark was made by Yukihiro Higashi, then professor of thermal energy at Iwaki Meisei University. After the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011, the Fukushima prefectural government defined "building communities that do not rely on nuclear energy" as a leading principle of its post-disaster rebuilding efforts.

It set a goal of having renewable energy sources cover all energy demand in the prefecture by around 2040. Higashi played a central role in working out that vision.

The goal may seem preposterous, but the professor's remarks led me to realize that it isn't.

LEADING ENERGY PLAYER

Fukushima Prefecture produced 10 percent of Japan's electricity before it was hit by the nuclear disaster. Most of that electricity was sent to the greater Tokyo area, so the prefecture was sometimes sarcastically referred to as a "colony of Tokyo."

But all that would have been impossible had it not been for the "swaths of land" and the "historical background" suitable to having electric power generated there.

Energy has always been the representative local product of Fukushima Prefecture. That history dates back to the late Edo Period (1603-1867), when the Joban coal field was discovered.

Energy created in the prefecture continued to support Japan's modernization even after electricity replaced coal as the leading player.

Living in Fukushima Prefecture provides plenty of opportunities to learn about that history.

A cluster of old hydroelectric plants stands in the environs of Lake Inawashiroko. A dozen of these plants, which were built during the Meiji (1868-1912) and Taisho (1912-1926) eras and taken over by Tokyo Electric Power Co., continue to send electricity to the greater Tokyo area to this day.

A step-like array of hydroelectric plants along the Tadamigawa river in the prefecture's western Oku-Aizu district was built in the postwar period in a desperate drive to "rebuild Japan."

Both hydroelectric undertakings drew on the bountiful water resources that are the blessings of the prefecture's terrain.

Nuclear reactors and a bunch of giant thermal power plants began to spring up along the Pacific coast during the high economic growth of the postwar period.

When cast in the context of that history, the goal set forth by the prefectural government appears to betray the pride of its own "leading local industry." The prefecture's people pledged that they are the ones who will replace the leading player of energy.

Ten days after I met Higashi, I visited the Yamatogawa Shuzoten sake brewery in Kitakata, Fukushima Prefecture, to see Yauemon Sato, the ninth-generation chief of the brewery, which has been operating since the mid-Edo Period.

Sato had founded Aizu Electric Power Co. in August 2013, setting out on an ambitious plan to help rebuild the prefecture by means of renewable energy sources.

"You know the caldron of hell?" Sato asked me. "You will be sent to hell and will be boiled in that caldron if you do evil. There are four such caldrons in Fukushima Prefecture. And they are still gaping."

The No. 1 through No. 4 reactors of TEPCO's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, which caused a calamity that will go down in the history of humankind, could certainly be called "caldrons of hell."

The use of renewable energy sources is a means for closing those caldrons and for obliterating them from Fukushima Prefecture.

More than two years later, the use of renewable energy sources is steadily gaining ground in the prefecture, covering 26.6 percent of all energy demand as of the end of March. The goal remains far in the distance, but the ratio has been gaining about 1 percentage point every year.

The caldrons are still gaping. TEPCO has yet to solve the question of how to block groundwater from flowing into the reactor buildings, which is only increasing the stockpile of water contaminated by radioactive substances. That is preventing the utility from starting serious work to decommission the reactors.

LEFT IN LIMBO

“What should we do?” a 59-year-old woman, evacuated from Okuma, which co-hosts the crippled nuclear power plant, to Koriyama, also in Fukushima Prefecture, asked me when I interviewed her about a year ago.

“Should we go on with our new life here, or should we return to our hometown? My thoughts remain in limbo, and I cannot get around to making up my mind.”

I did not know how to answer her question.

More than 94,000 people of Fukushima Prefecture continue to live as evacuees. The government of the town of Okuma, where all residents remain evacuated, plans to create a rebuilding base with a “habitable environment,” hopefully by fiscal 2018.

But full rebuilding of the town lies far beyond that goal. And that is leaving many people “in limbo.”

What should we do? My pursuit of that unanswered question will continue.

Planting rice in Nahara Town for the first time since 3/11

May 20, 2016

Rice farming resumes in a Fukushima town

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160520_20/

Farmers in a town near the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant have resumed rice farming for the first time since the nuclear accident in 2011.

A group of 10 farmers planted rice seedlings in a four-hectare paddy in Naraha Town on Friday.

The paddy contains fertilizers that limit the rice's absorption of radioactive substances.

The town was one of the communities ordered by the central government to evacuate after the accident.

When the order was lifted last September, test farming was done to confirm the safety of growing rice. Restrictions on rice shipments were lifted in March.

The farmers plan to harvest the rice in October. It will be shipped after being tested for radioactive substances.

This year the town plans to farm about 20 hectares of rice paddies, only about one-thirtieth of the area used before the accident.

The town is suffering a manpower shortage, as less than 10 percent of the residents have returned.

The group's leader, Mitsuo Sato, said the farmers have taken one step forward, and that he hopes more people will follow.

More compensation for TEPCO

May 26, 2016

TEPCO ordered to pay compensation over 2 Fukushima evacuee deaths

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160526/p2a/00m/0na/013000c>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) was ordered to pay compensation over the deaths of two evacuees from the Fukushima nuclear disaster in rulings at the Tokyo District Court on May 25.

The court, presided over by Judge Yuko Mizuno, ordered that a total of around 30 million yen be paid in the two cases to the relatives of evacuees Masami Fujiyoshi, who died at age 97, and a woman who died at age 86. Fujiyoshi was a patient at Futaba Hospital in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, and the woman was a patient at an adjacent, related facility for the elderly. Both died after being evacuated by bus around 230 kilometers away to the city of Iwaki. They were among around 50 patients at the facilities who died after the disaster.

The rulings are the third and fourth concerning patients evacuated from Futaba Hospital or related facilities. Just as in the first and second rulings, the latest rulings recognized a causal relationship between the nuclear disaster and the deaths of the evacuees.

Plaintiffs in the two newer cases had sought a total of about 66 million yen in compensation. In each of the latest cases the court set the compensation to be paid at 20 million yen, then reduced this by around 20 to 30 percent based on the evacuees' pre-existing conditions unrelated to the nuclear disaster.

TEPCO released a comment saying, "We will check the ruling and respond to it sincerely."

No electricity for 4 years...



Chikako Fujii says she uses a human-powered dynamo remodeled from a bike-type training machine to generate power in emergencies. (Junichi Bekku)





June 1, 2016

Woman gives up electricity and goes 'off grid' for 4 years

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201606010003.html>

By JUNICHI BEKKU/ Staff Writer

Chikako Fujii used to leave the TV on all the time, but since the Fukushima nuclear disaster inspired her to go "off grid" nearly four years ago, she has consumed literally no energy supplied from her regional power company.

Fujii, 55, a textile dyeing artist, uses a tiny amount of electricity generated primarily by solar panels set up on her veranda that measure a total of just 1.6 square meters.

The lifestyle choice means that Fujii cannot power an air conditioner, a refrigerator or a TV with such a small quantity of energy, but those things don't concern her.

"I enjoy working out how to lead a life without using electricity," she said.

A resident of Kunitachi, western Tokyo, Fujii terminated her contract with Tokyo Electric Power Co. in September 2012, after rolling blackouts were implemented in the wake of the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, which triggered a triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Fujii said that before the disaster struck, she habitually left the TV on so that she could check the time whenever she wanted.

But when she stopped using her home appliances one by one, she found her electricity bill could be reduced.

While she paid more than 4,000 yen (\$36) per month for electricity before the disaster, the figure gradually dropped to around 2,000 yen. When she finally unplugged the refrigerator, which requires much power, the bill reached 800 yen.

"I thought I might be able to live without relying on the power company, and decided to start an off-grid life for the fun of it," Fujii said.

The solar panels installed on the veranda have a power production capacity of 260 watts and can generate more than 1 kilowatt-hour of power on a typical sunny day--enough to operate a washing machine for three hours to dye fabrics with plant-derived materials.

However, when cloudy weather continues for a week during the June rainy season or due to a typhoon, the electricity stored in the battery dries up. When that happens, Fujii uses a pedal-operated sewing machine and an old charcoal-powered iron for her work instead of electric ones.

One night, Fujii was asked by a business partner to send a document by e-mail on short notice.

She pedaled hard a human-powered dynamo remodeled from a bike-type training machine to generate electricity to use her computer.

As Fujii cannot use an air conditioner, she made small holes in a plastic bag containing water and hung it above the veranda to sprinkle water automatically to cool the surrounding air.

In lieu of an electric kettle, she painted plastic bottles black and exposed them to sunlight to heat the water inside.

In December last year, Fujii also introduced a handmade heater made out of a used tempura oil-based lamp and a flowerpot put over the lamp upside down. According to Fujii, 20 milliliters of oil can keep the flowerpot hot for three to four hours.

She said she daily consumes only 500 to 800 watt-hours of power at home, about one-12th that for an ordinary household.

"I always live while being conscious of the weather," Fujii said. "For example, when I wake up to find it is sunny, I think I should use the washer today. Thinking this way is fun for me."

Abe in Fukushima

June 3, 2016

Abe visits villages in Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160603_39/

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe says his government will lead efforts to revive communities in Fukushima, including areas where radiation levels remain prohibitively high.

Abe on Friday inspected the villages of Kawauchi and Katsurao near the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. Evacuation orders for parts of the 2 villages are due to be lifted in mid-June.

In Katsurao, former residents asked the prime minister to support people who plan to return and resume farming and other businesses.

Abe told them that the desire to revive the hometown is the driving force for reconstruction. He promised to do his best to restore community ties and vitality.

Abe told reporters the government plans to present ideas by the summer for restoring heavily-contaminated areas declared unfit for return.

He said it will be a long process, but that his government is determined to see it through.

Fukushima rice back to normal?

June 2, 2016

Fukushima rice sales begin in the Middle East

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160602_12/

Farmers from Fukushima Prefecture have started to sell rice in Doha, the capital of Qatar. This is the first time they have exported their grain to the Middle East.

Sales of rice were affected by the 2011 nuclear accident in the prefecture.

A local town government in the prefecture and the Japan External Trade Organization held an event in Doha on Wednesday to mark the beginning of sales.

Customers in a super market sampled the rice which was grown in Inawashiro Town.

An official from a local agricultural organization of the region said he hopes to expand their market in other countries in the Middle East.

Food companies and producers from Fukushima have been trying to convince overseas customers that rice grown in the prefecture is safe.

In February, they promoted their products at one of the world's largest food trade shows in Dubai. They say their efforts have led to **sales in the Middle East**.

They have also succeeded to export their grain to **Singapore and Malaysia**.

Public outcry over radioactive soil project

June 8, 2016

Radioactive soil to be used to build roads set to spark uproar

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201606080056.html>

By YU KOTSUBO/ Staff Writer

A public outcry is expected when radioactive earth from the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster is recycled and used to construct roads and in other building projects.

"Fierce resistance would likely arise if the contaminated earth were used in prefectures other than Fukushima Prefecture," said an official at an Environment Ministry study meeting on June 7.

But Shinji Inoue, senior vice environment minister, said the ministry will proceed with recycling despite expected opposition.

"We are set to promote the reuse (of contaminated earth) by endeavoring to gain public understanding across the country, including Fukushima Prefecture," he said after the meeting.

Polluted earth will be covered by either clean earth, concrete, asphalt or other material to minimize radiation exposure to construction workers and residents living near the facilities built using radioactive soil.

Twenty-two million cubic meters, the equivalent of 18 Tokyo Dome stadiums, is the amount of contaminated soil expected to be produced in total from the cleanup work in areas around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant and elsewhere in the prefecture. It is unclear how much of the polluted soil will be used in building projects.

Ministry officials decided at the meeting that the soil to be recycled will be restricted to that in which radioactivity measures 8,000 becquerels or less per kilogram.

The recycling is aimed to cut the amount of radioactive soil to be shipped to other prefectures for final disposal.

If the soil has more than 8,000 becquerels of radioactivity per kilogram, the central government is obliged under law to safely dispose of it.

The ministry envisages the use of contaminated earth for raising the ground level in the construction of roads, seawalls, railways and other public works projects.

It can also be used to cover waste at disposal sites.

The 22 million cubic meters of soil is to be kept at the interim storage site to be built near the crippled nuclear plant in Fukushima Prefecture. After being kept there for about 30 years, it is scheduled under law to be dumped outside the prefecture.

Stigma attached to cancer

June 7, 2016

Fukushima woman speaks out about her thyroid cancer

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201606070049.html>

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

KORIYAMA, Fukushima Prefecture--She's 21, has thyroid cancer, and wants people in her prefecture in northeastern Japan to get screened for it. That statement might not seem provocative, but her prefecture is Fukushima, and of the 173 young people with confirmed or suspected cases since the 2011 nuclear meltdowns there, **she is the first to speak out.**

That near-silence highlights the fear Fukushima thyroid-cancer patients have about being the "nail that sticks out," and thus gets hammered.

The thyroid-cancer rate in the northern Japanese prefecture is many times higher than what is generally found, particularly among children, but the Japanese government says more cases are popping up because of rigorous screening, not the radiation that spewed from Fukushima No. 1 power plant.

To be seen as challenging that view carries consequences in this rigidly harmony-oriented society. **Even just having cancer that might be related to radiation carries a stigma** in the only country to be hit with atomic bombs.

"There aren't many people like me who will openly speak out," said the young woman, who requested anonymity because of fears about harassment. "That's why I'm speaking out so others can feel the same. I can speak out because I'm the kind of person who believes things will be OK."

She has a quick disarming smile and silky black hair. She wears flip-flops. She speaks passionately about her new job as a nursery school teacher. But she also has deep fears: Will she be able to get married? Will her children be healthy?

She suffers from the only disease that the medical community, including the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, has acknowledged is clearly related to the radioactive iodine that spewed into the surrounding areas after the only nuclear disaster worse than Fukushima's, the 1986 explosion and fire at Chernobyl, Ukraine.

Though international reviews of Fukushima have predicted that cancer rates will not rise as a result of the meltdowns there, **some researchers believe the prefecture's high thyroid-cancer rate is related to the accident.**

The government has ordered medical testing of the 380,000 people who were 18 years or under and in Fukushima prefecture at the time of the March 2011 tsunami and quake that sank three reactors into meltdowns. About 38 percent have yet to be screened, and the number is a whopping 75 percent for those who are now between the ages of 18 and 21.

The young woman said she came forward because she wants to help other patients, especially children, who may be afraid and confused. She doesn't know whether her sickness was caused by the nuclear accident, but plans to get checked for other possible sicknesses, such as uterine cancer, just to be safe.

"I want everyone, all the children, to go to the hospital and get screened. They think it's too much trouble, and there are no risks, and they don't go," the woman said in a recent interview in Fukushima. "My cancer was detected early, and I learned that was important."

Thyroid cancer is among the most curable cancers, though some patients need medication for the rest of their lives, and all need regular checkups.

The young woman had one cancerous thyroid removed, and does not need medication except for painkillers. But she has become prone to hormonal imbalance and gets tired more easily. She used to be a star athlete, and snowboarding remains a hobby.

A barely discernible tiny scar is on her neck, like a pale kiss mark or scratch. She was hospitalized for nearly two weeks, but she was itching to get out. It really hurt then, but there is no pain now, she said with a smile.

"My ability to bounce right back is my trademark," she said. "I'm always able to keep going."

She was mainly worried about her parents, especially her mother, who cried when she found out her daughter had cancer. Her two older siblings also were screened but were fine.

Many Japanese have deep fears about genetic abnormalities caused by radiation. Many, especially older people, assume all cancers are fatal, and even the young woman did herself until her doctors explained her sickness to her.

The young woman said her former boyfriend's family had expressed reservations about their relationship because of her sickness. She has a new boyfriend now, a member of Japan's military, and he understands about her sickness, she said happily.

A support group for thyroid cancer patients was set up earlier this year. The group, which includes lawyers and medical doctors, has refused all media requests for interviews with the handful of families that have joined, saying that kind of attention may be dangerous.

When the group held a news conference in Tokyo in March, it connected by live video feed with two fathers with children with thyroid cancer, but their faces were not shown, to disguise their identities. They criticized the treatment their children received and said they're not certain the government is right in saying the cancer and the nuclear meltdowns are unrelated.

Hiroyuki Kawai, a lawyer who also advises the group, believes patients should file Japan's equivalent of a class-action lawsuit, demanding compensation, but he acknowledged more time will be needed for any legal action.

"The patients are divided. They need to unite, and they need to talk with each other," he said in a recent interview.

The committee of doctors and other experts carrying out the screening of youngsters in Fukushima for thyroid cancer periodically update the numbers of cases found, and they have been steadily climbing. In a news conference this week, they stuck to the view the cases weren't related to radiation. Most disturbing was a cancer found in a child who was just 5 years old in 2011, the youngest case found so far. But the experts brushed it off, saying one wasn't a significant number.

"It is hard to think there is any relationship," with radiation, said Hokuto Hoshi, a medical doctor who heads the committee.

Shinsyu Hida, a photographer from Fukushima and an adviser to the patients' group, said fears are great not only about speaking out but also about cancer and radiation.

He said that when a little girl who lives in Fukushima once asked him if she would ever be able to get married, because of the stigma attached to radiation, he was lost for an answer and wept afterward.

"They feel alone. They can't even tell their relatives," Hida said of the patients. "They feel they can't tell anyone. They felt they were not allowed to ask questions."

The woman who spoke to AP also expressed her views on video for a film in the works by independent American filmmaker Ian Thomas Ash.

She counts herself lucky. About 18,000 people were killed in the tsunami, and many more lost their homes to the natural disaster and the subsequent nuclear accident, but her family's home was unscathed.

When asked how she feels about nuclear power, she replied quietly that Japan doesn't need nuclear plants. Without them, she added, maybe she would not have gotten sick.

Ash's video interview:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLpmdZYCRIZfvTtTE1sbY3ynaGsfDYmNWn>

Evacuation order lifted but only 10 % to return

Les plus visités farmlandgrab.org | en Fukushima 福島第一 Débuter avec Firefox grain.org - english Global Ch



Lights appears at only a few houses in Katsurao, Fukushima Prefecture, on June 11, the eve of the government's lifting of the evacuation order following the 2011 nuclear accident. Waste from decontamination operations is covered with sheets in the foreground. (Yosuke Fukudome)

June 12, 2016

Evacuation lifted for Fukushima village; only 10% preparing return

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The government on June 12 lifted the evacuation order for Katsurao, a village northwest of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, but most of the residents appear reluctant to return home. The lifting of the order covers more than 90 percent of the households in Katsurao. The entire village was ordered to evacuate after the crisis at the Fukushima plant started to unfold on March 11, 2011.

Katsurao is the fourth municipality in Fukushima Prefecture that had the evacuation order lifted, following the Miyakoji district in Tamura, the eastern area of Kawauchi village and Naraha.

Government officials said cleanup and other efforts have **reduced radiation levels in Katsurao to a point that poses little problem.** The lifting of the evacuation order means that 1,347 people from 418 households, out of 1,466 people from 451 households in Katsurao, can return to their homes to live in the village.

But only 126 people from 53 households, or 10 percent of those eligible to return, have signed up for a program for extended stays in the village to prepare for their return, according to Katsurao officials. The officials said they believe that many evacuees would rather go back and forth between temporary housing and their homes in Katsurao for the time being, given the situation in the village.

Medical institutions and shops have yet to resume operations in Katsurao. And **nearly half of the rice paddies there are being used for the temporary storage of radioactive waste produced in the cleanup operation.**

Local officials say they have no idea when the waste can be moved out of the village for permanent storage.

Among the Katsurao residents eligible to return are those with homes in the government-designated “residence restricted zone,” where the annual radiation dose was projected at more than 20 millisieverts and up to 50 millisieverts as of March 2012.

This was the first time evacuees from such a zone have been permitted to return home.

Only the “difficult-to-return zone” carries a higher annual radiation dose.

The government plans to lift evacuation orders for other parts of the prefecture by the end of March 2017, except for the “difficult-to-return zone,” where the annual radiation dose was estimated at 50 millisieverts or higher as of March 2012.

The additional lifting of the evacuation orders would allow 46,000 of 70,000 displaced residents to return to their homes to live.

(This article was written by Makoto Takada and Yuri Oiwa.)

Another evacuation order lifted in Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160612_04/

The Japanese government has lifted its evacuation order for most parts of a village near the crippled nuclear plant in Fukushima. Katsurao Village became the 4th such municipality after the 2011 nuclear disaster.

Officials lifted the restriction on Saturday midnight except some areas where the radiation level remains high. All of over 1,400 residents there were forced to evacuate. Now most of them are allowed to return home.

According to a survey the village conducted last year, nearly half of the respondents said all or at least parts of their family want to return home when the order is lifted.

Local authorities say they will work to ease concerns over radiation and provide medical services. They will also ask shops to reopen there to sell foods and everyday essentials.

The evacuation order remains in 9 municipalities in Fukushima. This is forcing more than 90,000 people to continue living away from home.

Evacuation order lifted (2)



June 12, 2016

Radioactive waste contained in thousands of black plastic bags are placed in rice paddies in the village of Katsurao, Fukushima Prefecture, where an evacuation advisory was lifted for most of the village Sunday. | KYODO

Advisory lifted for most of evacuated village of Katsurao close to crippled Fukushima nuclear power plant

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/06/12/national/advisory-lifted-for-most-of-evacuated-village-of-katsurao-close-to-crippled-fukushima-nuclear-power-plant/#.V115tuRddLN>

JJI

FUKUSHIMA – The government Sunday lifted its evacuation advisory for most of Katsurao, a village near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in Fukushima Prefecture.

This is the first time that an evacuation advisory has been lifted for an area tainted with relatively high levels of radiation with annual doses projected at between more than 20 millisieverts and less than 50 millisieverts.

The government's move allows 1,347 people in 418 households to return home for the first time since the March 2011 disaster at the plant, operated by Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc.

But only a few people are expected to return home for the time being due to inconveniences in everyday life in the village. Municipal bus services remain suspended while shops have yet to resume operations. The village government plans to offer free taxi services for elderly people so that they can go to hospitals and commercial facilities outside the village.

Earlier this month, the village's chamber of commerce and industry started services to deliver fresh foods and daily necessities to homes.

The evacuation advisory remains in place for 119 people in 33 households from the remaining Katsurao area where annual radiation doses are estimated at over 50 millisieverts.

Well water for Katsurao

June 13, 2016

Well water introduced in a Fukushima village

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160613_16/

NHK has learned that a village near the crippled nuclear power plant in Fukushima is providing well water to more than 40 percent of its households. Water from wells is thought be less affected by fallout from the nuclear accident at the plant.

An evacuation order for most parts of Katsurao Village was lifted on Sunday, except for some areas where radiation levels remain high.

All of the more than 1,400 residents there had been forced to evacuate. Now most of them are being allowed to return home.

The village has gradually switched the source of tap water for about 200 households, more than 40 percent of the total, from a mountain stream to deep groundwater.

Village officials say they are using water from wells more than 10 meters deep. They say the measure was taken in consideration of residents' concerns about their drinking water.

The officials say they will continue to provide a good living environment for those who wish to return to the village.

Concerns about radiation yet farming is resuming

June 13, 2016

Katsurao mayor: We will create a new village

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160613_23/

The mayor of a village near the crippled nuclear plant in Fukushima has urged officials to work together to create a new village now that the evacuation order has been lifted.

The evacuation order for Katsurao Village was lifted for most areas on Sunday.

On Monday, Mayor Masahide Matsumoto addressed about 40 village officials.

He said it was a difficult decision to accept the lifting of the evacuation order, as concerns remain about radiation. But he added that encouraging signs can also be seen, such as a resumption of farming.

The mayor urged the officials to start creating a new village where residents can feel safe.

More than 1,400 residents were forced to evacuate after the 2011 accident of Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

According to a survey the village conducted last year, nearly half of the respondents said all or parts of their families want to return when the order is lifted.

A village official said she wants to support both those who will return to the village and those who decide to stay away for a while longer.

Katsurao: Only 14% demolition work needed completed

June 12, 2016

Demolition work delay hinders Fukushima villagers' homecoming

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160611/p2a/00m/0na/016000c>

FUKUSHIMA -- Though the nuclear disaster evacuation order for the Fukushima Prefecture village of Katsurao is set to be lifted on June 12, **just 14 percent of demolition work needed before homes can be rebuilt has been completed.**

The village currently comprises three evacuation statuses: "areas preparing for the lifting of evacuation orders" with annual accumulated radiation doses of 20 millisieverts or less; "restricted residency zones" with annual accumulated radiation doses from over 20 millisieverts to 50 millisieverts; and "difficult-to-return zones." As of June 12, the 1,347 residents from 418 households in the former two categories will be allowed to move back home. A return schedule for the 119 residents from 33 households with homes in areas in the last category has yet to be determined as radiation levels remain high.

A survey by the village government showed that nearly 50 percent of residents wished to return home. However, as of June 8 only 126 people, or less than 10 percent of residents, had registered to stay overnight in preparation for their complete return.

The Environment Ministry began demolishing houses in 2012 for those who wanted to rebuild their homes in 11 Fukushima Prefecture municipalities subject to nuclear disaster evacuation orders. Of 347 demolition requests in Katsurao, only 14 percent have been completed. Officials say that field research and paperwork are taking time. Overall, a little less than 40 percent of requested work has been done in all 11 municipalities.

Eight municipalities -- including Katsurao and the city of Minamisoma, where evacuation orders are to be lifted on July 12 -- are requesting the central government to speed up demolition work as the delay is hindering residents' return to their hometowns. A senior Katsurao village official says locals have been complaining about the demolition work not advancing as planned.

The Environment Ministry hopes to complete about 90 percent of demolition work by March 2017 by streamlining paperwork, but many residents are expected to be unable to return home even after evacuation orders are lifted, as it will take time to rebuild houses after the demolition is completed. A ministry official explained that there are people who will be able to return home immediately after the evacuation order is lifted, and that it would be inappropriate to keep the orders in place until all the demolition work is done. At the same time, the official said that the ministry will give those who wish to return priority in the demolition work schedule.

Fukushima University social welfare professor Fuminori Tamba, who helped map out disaster recovery plans for municipalities under evacuation orders, pointed out that the lack of progress in demolitions is problematic, since securing housing is the minimum requirement for residents to return. He added that the availability of housing should be considered when lifting evacuation orders.

Katsurao farmer and cattle rancher Hidenori Endo, 74, applied for demolition of his decaying home and barn last summer. Tired of waiting, Endo paid a private firm nearly 10 million yen to tear down the buildings in May.

"I wanted to go home as soon as possible," Endo said.

He now lives in a temporary housing unit in the town of Miharu, about 30 kilometers from his Katsurao home. Endo travels an hour by car daily to his property to restart his farming business, but taking good care of his cattle is difficult to do going back and forth. To reboot his business, Endo first needs to rebuild his home. Construction work is to begin this summer, but he does not yet know when the work will be completed, and will have to live in the temporary housing for at least another year.

The central government has set prerequisites, such as infrastructure development and operation of everyday services, for lifting nuclear crisis evacuation orders. However, housing is not included in these criteria.

"Even if I could go shopping, there isn't much I could do if there was no place to live. It's not right to be unable to return to home even with the evacuation order gone," Endo lamented.

Another evacuation order lifted

June 14, 2016

Evacuation order lifted for Fukushima village

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160614_02/

An order to evacuate parts of a village in Fukushima Prefecture following a nuclear accident over 5 years ago has been lifted.

Officials ended the mandatory evacuation of the **eastern districts of the village of Kawauchi** on Tuesday, 2 days after lifting a similar order for the nearby village of Katsurao.

51 villagers are now able to return to their homes in the districts of Ogi and Kainosaka, which are less than 20 kilometers from the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

The nuclear accident in March, 2011, forced villagers, especially those living in the east, to flee.

In October 2014, the evacuation order was lifted for some areas of the village, but remained in place for the 2 eastern districts.

Only a handful of people are expected to return to the districts. Decontamination work has not been conducted in the woods surrounding the locations, and it would be difficult for people living in the area to go shopping or see a doctor.

Despite steady progress in the lifting of evacuation orders in Fukushima Prefecture, challenges remain in the move to return evacuees and rebuild the region amid lingering worries about radiation.

All is well...(1)

June 17, 2016

Salmon hatchery reopened in Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160617_29/

People in Naraha Town, Fukushima Prefecture, have celebrated the reopening of a local salmon hatchery that was destroyed in the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

About 80 fishermen and town officials attended a ceremony to mark the event near the Kido River on Friday.

The river was well known for salmon fishing, but its yield declined drastically after the disaster.

Naraha Mayor Yukiei Matsumoto said he will do all he can so that people who used to visit the river will come back and reinvigorate the town.

The hatchery was partially restored last year, but its temporary equipment could store only one-fourth the amount of salmon fry kept there before the disaster.

Officials say the equipment was fully restored in May and can now store about 10 million fry -- almost the same as before the disaster.

All is well... (2)

June 18, 2016

French ambassador holds dinner with Fukushima food

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160618_04/

The French ambassador to Japan has held a dinner using foodstuffs from the northeastern prefecture of Fukushima.

The prefecture is struggling to dispel unfounded rumors and concerns about the safety of local produce following the 2011 nuclear accident in the prefecture.

Ambassador Thierry Dana invited more than 20 people to the dinner on Friday at his official residence in Tokyo. Prefectural Governor Masao Uchibori and others from Fukushima were among the guests.

The invitees enjoyed dishes cooked with ingredients produced in Fukushima, including meat and vegetables.

Ambassador Dana said he heard the prefecture is still in trouble due to radiation-related rumors even after the safety of its food products has been confirmed.

He said he wants to support Fukushima by promoting local produce. He added that foodstuffs from the prefecture go well with French dishes.

Governor Uchibori said combining local produce with French dishes is a new form of support and will help eliminate harmful rumors. He added that he wants to continue promoting the safety of the food at home and abroad.

All is well... (3)

June 19, 2016

Fukushima rice set to make first EU foray with debut in Britain

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/06/19/national/fukushima-rice-set-to-make-first-eu-foray-with-debut-in-britain/#.V2afhKJdeot>

Fukushima Minpo

Fukushima-harvested rice will hit the stores in Britain in July, which might make it the first member of the EU to import the grain, following a sustained effort by a group of Fukushima natives in London fighting rumors about the safety of the crop.

It is also the third nation, after Singapore and Malaysia, to import Fukushima rice since the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami caused three reactor meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. Starting next month, 1.9 tons of Fukushima rice called Ten no Tsubu will be sold in London. A Fukushima branch of National Federation of Agricultural Cooperative Associations, a Japanese farmers group better known as Zen-Noh, will export the rice via a British trading company.

“With the U.K. as a foothold, we hope to expand the sale of prefecture-produced rice to other EU member countries,” said Nobuo Ohashi, who heads the Fukushima branch of Zen-Noh.

According to Japan’s Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Ministry, the EU has been phasing out its ban on Fukushima food products since the nuclear disaster started. But for Fukushima rice, the EU still obliges importers to submit a radiation test certified by the Japanese government or sample tests by the member nation importing it.

“It’s bright news for Fukushima, which has been struggling with the import restrictions,” said an official at the prefectural office in charge of promoting its products. “We will make further efforts so the restrictions will be lifted entirely.”

There were many hurdles to overcome.

Amid fears that Fukushima products were tainted with radioactive fallout, Yoshiro Mitsuyama, who heads the Fukushima group in London, consulted an official at Zen-Noh’s branch in Germany on how to sell Fukushima products a few years ago.

With the help of Zen-Noh, Mitsuyama’s group started selling Fukushima-made rice, peach and apple juice at the annual Japan Matsuri held at London’s Trafalgar Square three years ago.

The products were popular with London residents. When Visit Japan Ambassador Martin Barrow came to Fukushima last April, he bought some local produce.

“I want to help sell Fukushima fruits like cherries, apples and pears in London as well, not just rice,” said Mitsuyama.

This section, appearing every third Monday, features topics and issues covered by the Fukushima Minpo, the largest newspaper in Fukushima Prefecture. The original article was published on May 25.

Where does bribery start?

June 19, 2016 (Mainichi Japan)

Fukushima village reaches out to single-parent families after evacuation order lifted

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160619/p2a/00m/0na/004000c>

KAWAUCHI, Fukushima -- The municipal government here, where an evacuation order, issued following the 2011 outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear crisis, was lifted on June 14, is encouraging single-parent families in urban areas to move to the village in a bid to put the brakes on its population decline and aging.

- 【Related】 Evacuation order for Fukushima village to be lifted in June

To that end, the Kawauchi Municipal Government plans to provide up to 800,000 yen in subsidies to each single-parent family that moves to the village.

"It's possible to live more comfortably in the village than in Tokyo and other urban areas," says an official of the municipal government in charge of the program.

A total of 51 people in 19 households in the Ogi and Kainosaka districts in eastern Kawauchi were affected by the evacuation order that was lifted on June 14. Most of these people have no plans to return home.

Evacuation orders had been lifted in all areas in the village apart from Ogi and Kainosaka by October 2014. Nevertheless, only about 1,800 of some 3,000 residents who had lived in the village before the disaster had returned by April 1 this year.

Approximately 40 percent of those who have returned are elderly people aged 65 or over.

As countermeasures against population decline and aging, the Kawauchi Municipal Government has decided to offer financial incentives to encourage single-parent households outside the village, including those in urban areas, to move in.

Specifically, the municipal government will provide 600,000 yen to each single-parent household that will live in the village to help them buy a car and move into their new home, and 50,000 yen per person (for up to four people) to cover miscellaneous expenses.

The maximum amount of the subsidies is 800,000 yen for a family comprising a parent and three children. The municipal government will introduce full-time jobs at companies operating in the village to those who move there, and provide a subsidy to cover half of the rent of privately owned apartments (up to 20,000 yen).

The municipal government will organize a two-day tour for those who are interested in the program July 29-30, and will begin to accept applicants for the tour as early as this week.

The village will use grants from the national government, which are part of measures to revitalize local economies, to finance the program. Under the program, the municipal government is considering accepting five to 10 new residents a year through fiscal 2017, and about 15 residents per year beyond that.

Moreover, a consultative council encouraging single-parent families to move into the village will be set up with the participation of a local women's association. Elderly women living in the village will support new residents' childrearing. Day care services are provided for free in the village.

Subsidies fund to run out in 2017

June 29, 2016

Subsidies for residents near Fukushima No. 1 plant to run out next year

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/06/29/national/prefectures-subsidies-residents-near-fukushima-no-1-plant-run-next-year/#.V3Nq_aJdeot

JJI

FUKUSHIMA – Fukushima Prefecture's fund to provide subsidies to residents living near Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant is expected to run out during fiscal 2017, sources said Tuesday.

The prefectural government will hold talks with nine municipalities around the plant this autumn to decide whether to abolish the subsidy program during fiscal 2016, which ends next March, or find a new revenue source to continue it, the sources said.

The fund finances benefits provided to some 33,770 households and offices in the nine municipalities.

The balance of the fund is expected to decline to about ¥50 million by the end of fiscal 2016 from ¥280 million a year before.

Benefits to residents near the plant began in fiscal 1981. Initially, they were provided by the central government through the prefecture.

The central government halted the grants to the prefecture at the end of fiscal 2014, after Tepco decided in January 2014 to decommission all of the reactors at the plant following its triple meltdown in March 2011.

But **the prefectural government continued the provision using subsidies not given to residents whose whereabouts became unknown after the nuclear disaster started.**

Back to "near normal"...



A man fishes in the town of Hirono, Fukushima Prefecture, in November 2015. The town is located near the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. | KYODO

July 4, 2016

Pacific Ocean radiation back near normal after Fukushima: study

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/07/04/national/science-health/pacific-ocean-radiation-back-near-normal-after-fukushima-study/#.V3ohdKJdeos>

AFP-JIJI

SYDNEY – Radiation levels across the Pacific Ocean are rapidly returning to normal five years after the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant spewed gases and liquids into the sea, according to a study released Monday.

In the days following the start of the crisis on March 11, 2011, seawater meant to cool the nuclear reactors carried radioactive elements back into the Pacific, with currents dispersing it widely.

Five years on, a review by the Scientific Committee on Oceanic Research, which brings together ocean experts from across the world, said radioactive material had been carried as far as the United States.

But after analyzing data from 20 studies of radioactivity associated with the plant, it found radiation levels in the Pacific were rapidly returning to normal after being tens of millions of times higher than usual following the disaster.

“As an example, in 2011 about half of fish samples in coastal waters off Fukushima contained unsafe levels of radioactive material,” said Pere Masque, who co-authored the review published by the Annual Review of Marine Science. “However, by 2015 that number had dropped to less than 1 percent above the limit.”

But the study also found that the seafloor and harbor near Fukushima No. 1 were still highly contaminated in the wake of the world’s worst nuclear accident since Chernobyl in 1986.

“Monitoring of radioactivity levels and sea life in that area must continue,” said Masque, a professor of environmental radio-chemistry at the Edith Cowan University in Western Australia.

The research examined radioactive cesium levels measured off the Japanese coast across the Pacific to North America.

Cesium is a by-product of nuclear power and is highly soluble in water, making it ideal for measuring the release of radioactive material into the ocean, the study said.

Although no one is recorded as having died as a direct result of the nuclear accident, tens of thousands of people were uprooted, with many still unable to return home because of persistent contamination.

Cleaning up Fukushima and making the area habitable again is a crucial plank of government policy, with the Abe administration keen to prove nuclear power is a viable form of energy production.

04.07.2016_No130 / News in Brief

Pacific Ocean Radiation Rapidly Returning To Normal After Fukushima, Says Report

<http://www.nucnet.org/all-the-news/2016/07/04/pacific-ocean-radiation-rapidly-returning-to-normal-after-fukushima-says-report>

Security & Safety

4 Jul (NucNet): Radiation levels across the Pacific Ocean are rapidly returning to normal five years after the Fukushima-Daiichi accident in Japan led to extensive releases of radioactive gases, volatiles, and liquids, particularly to the coastal ocean, a report by the Scientific Committee on Oceanic Research says. The committee, which brings together ocean experts from across the world, said radioactive material had been carried as far as the US.

But after analysing data from 20 studies of radioactivity associated with Fukushima-Daiichi, it found radiation levels in the Pacific were rapidly returning to normal after being “tens of millions” of times higher than usual following the accident.

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“Monitoring of radioactivity levels and sea life in that area must continue, said Prof. Masque, a professor of environmental radiochemistry at the Edith Cowan University in Western Australia.

The research examined radioactive caesium levels measured off Japan's coast across the Pacific to North America.

The report is online: <http://bit.ly/29gDvWh>

<http://www.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev-marine-010816-060733>

Test breeding starts in Nahara

July 7, 2016

Trial cattle farming starts in Fukushima's Naraha

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160707_02/

Cattle farming has restarted on a trial basis in a town near the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

After the 2011 nuclear accident, evacuation orders were issued for most parts of Naraha Town. All of the 40 or so cattle breeders in the area suspended their business or gave it up.

The evacuation order for the town was lifted last September. The town's government decided on test breeding to pave the way for reviving its livestock industry.

Shuko Watanabe took on the task from the town. Four female calves were delivered to his farm on Wednesday. He led them into the cattle shed and gave them fodder.

The test will continue until the end of this year to confirm its safety. Town officials say they hope farmers will resume full operation in January.

About 9,000 dollars are needed to purchase one calf. The town provides subsidies, but farmers must shoulder about half of the cost.

And it takes at least 2 years to ship the cattle, meaning no revenues during the period.

Watanabe said he is happy to be able to keep cattle once again, adding that he'll work hard even though he must restart from scratch.

Evacuation order for Minamisoma lifted

July 12, 2016

Evacuation order lifted for 10,000 residents of Minamisoma

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/07/12/national/evacuation-orders-lifted-fukushima-city-minamisoma-10000-can-go-home/#.V4TR2qJdeot>

Kyodo

FUKUSHIMA – The government on Tuesday lifted the evacuation order for all but a tiny slice of Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, allowing more than 10,000 people to return to homes that have been off-limits since the 2011 nuclear crisis.

The city is now habitable except for one area containing one house, but many residents appear uneager to return, having begun new lives elsewhere.

To encourage evacuees to return, the central government and the city reopened hospital facilities, built makeshift commercial facilities and prepared other infrastructure.

The newly opened areas have 3,487 households.

Radiation cleanup activities have finished in residential areas but will continue for roads and farmland until next March.

The government is in the process of gradually lifting evacuation orders in areas within 20 km of the wrecked Fukushima No. 1 nuclear facility and in certain areas beyond the zone amid ongoing radiation cleanup efforts.

Eight municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture have areas defined as evacuation zones, which are divided into three categories based on their radiation levels. The most seriously contaminated areas are called zones “where it is expected that the residents have difficulties in returning for a long time.”

The government hopes to lift the remaining evacuation orders affecting areas other than the difficult-to-return zones by next March, officials said.

Evacuation order lifted for Fukushima village

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160712_06/

An evacuation order has been lifted for most parts of a city in Fukushima Prefecture following the 2011 nuclear disaster.

Minamisoma City became the 5th and largest-ever municipality to have its evacuation order lifted since the disaster.

The evacuation order for the city's districts of Odaka and Haramachi was lifted on Tuesday.

One household is still barred from returning because its area has a relatively high level of radiation.

About 10,800 residents are now allowed to return to their homes.

The city must deal with a declining and aging population. Young people moved out of the city following the nuclear accident.

The local government is trying to mitigate public concern about radiation, improve the medical welfare system and transportation network, and attract commercial facilities.

More than 5 years on, evacuation orders are still in place in several other municipalities in the prefecture. About 90,000 people are still taking shelter in Fukushima and elsewhere.

July 12, 2016 (Mainichi Japan)

Nuclear disaster evacuation order covering 10,000 Minamisoma residents lifted

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160712/p2a/00m/0na/018000c>

MINAMISOMA, Fukushima -- Some 10,000 Minamisoma residents of this city were officially permitted to return home after Fukushima nuclear disaster evacuation orders covering parts of the city were lifted on July 12.

Eleven municipalities near the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant were evacuated after the March 2011 meltdowns, but this is the first order to be lifted covering so many people. However, as five years and four months have passed since the disaster and concerns about radiation persist, many evacuees have already put down roots elsewhere, and only a portion of residents are expected to return.

The order covered 3,487 households totaling 10,807 people in the city's southern Odaka and Haramachi wards. Only one household of two people in a high-radiation area was not cleared to return. However, as of July 10 only 2,006 people from 691 households had registered to stay in the area in preparation for moving back. Many problems face the city, such as how to sustain communities where most child-bearing-age residents have not returned and elderly residents predominate.

July 12 also marked the resumption of train services on the JR Joban Line on the 9.4 kilometer stretch between Odaka and Haranomachi stations. Many passengers this day were gazing out the train windows at the rural landscape, while residents could be seen by the tracks holding a banner reading "Welcome back" and waving.

At a ceremony at Odaka Station for the lifting of the evacuation order, Mayor Katsunobu Sakurai said, "This is not the end of our reconstruction, it is the beginning."

Sachiko Shoji, 60, who evacuated from the Fukushima Prefecture town of Namie to temporary housing in Minamisoma's Haramachi Ward, said after riding on the Joban Line, "This train line is memorable for me

as the one I used to go from Namie to Haramachi to attend barber school. As I saw the nostalgic scenery, I thought that I, too, have to keep trying to move forward."

The parts of the Joban Line still closed to service -- between Soma Station in Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, and Hamayoshida Station in Watari, Miyagi Prefecture, and between Tatsuta Station in Naraha, Fukushima Prefecture, and Odaka Station -- are to be reopened this year and by March 2020, respectively.

"There is no return to normal after this nuclear catastrophe"

Radiation along Fukushima rivers up to 200 times higher than Pacific Ocean seabed - Greenpeace

<http://www.greenpeace.org/japan/ja/news/press/2016/pr201607211/>

Tokyo, 21 July 2016 – Radioactive contamination in the seabed off the Fukushima coast is hundreds of times above pre-2011 levels, while contamination in local rivers is up to 200 times higher than ocean sediment, according to results from Greenpeace Japan survey work released today.

"The extremely high levels of radioactivity we found along the river systems highlights the enormity and longevity of both the environmental contamination and the public health risks resulting from the Fukushima disaster," said Ai Kashiwagi, Energy Campaigner at Greenpeace Japan.

"These river samples were taken in areas where the Abe government is stating it is safe for people to live. But the results show there is no return to normal after this nuclear catastrophe," said Kashiwagi.

Riverbank sediment samples taken along the Niida River in Minami Soma, measured as high as 29,800 Bq/kg for radiocaesium (Cs-134 and 137). The Niida samples were taken where there are no restrictions on people living, as were other river samples. At the estuary of the Abukuma River in Miyagi prefecture, which lies more than 90km north of the Fukushima Daiichi plant, levels measured in sediment samples were as high as 6,500 Bq/kg.

The lifting of evacuation orders in March 2017 for areas that remain highly contaminated is a looming human rights crisis and cannot be permitted to stand. The vast expanses of contaminated forests and freshwater systems will remain a perennial source of radioactivity for the foreseeable future, as these ecosystems cannot simply be decontaminated.

Caesium-137 has a half life of 30 years, and will continue to pose a risks to the the environment and human health for hundreds of years. Cs-137 contamination in seabed samples near the Fukushima plant was measured at up to 120 Bq/kg – compared to levels pre-2011 of 0.3 Bq/kg. Further, the levels of contamination found 60km south of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant were comparable with those found within 4km of the plant. Numerous marine science investigations, have concluded that these higher levels are one explanation for some marine species still showing higher cesium levels than the background levels in seawater.

"The radiation levels in the sediment off the coast of Fukushima are low compared to land contamination, which is what we expected and consistent with other research," said Kendra Ulrich, Senior Global Energy Campaigner at Greenpeace Japan. "The sheer size of the Pacific Ocean combined with powerful complex currents means the largest single release of radioactivity into the marine environment has led to the widespread dispersal of contamination."

Most of the radioactivity in Fukushima Daiichi reactor units 1-3 core fuel in March 2011 remains at the site.

“The scientific community must receive all necessary support to continue their research into the impacts of this disaster,” said Ulrich.

“In addition to the ongoing contamination from forests and rivers, the vast amount of radioactivity onsite at the destroyed nuclear plant remains one of the greatest nuclear threats to Fukushima coastal communities and the Pacific Ocean. The hundreds of thousands of tonnes of highly contaminated water, the apparent failure of the ice wall to reduce groundwater contamination, and the unprecedented challenge of three molten reactor cores all add up to a nuclear crisis that is far from over,” said Ulrich. A radiation survey team onboard the research vessel Asakaze, supported by the Greenpeace flagship Rainbow Warrior, conducted underwater survey work along the Fukushima coastline from 21 February to 11 March this year, as well collecting samples in river systems. The samples were measured at an independent laboratory in Tokyo.

Notes to editors:

Link to the report, Atomic Depths, can be found [here](#)

Photo and video clip reel can be accessed [here](#)

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Fukushima people need time to decide

July 19, 2016

EDITORIAL: Fukushima residents need time in deciding on their futures

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201607190028.html>

The central government lifted an evacuation order for the southern part of Minami-Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, on July 12 for the first time since the massive earthquake and tsunami triggered a devastating accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011.

It marks the sixth time that evacuation orders have been lifted for locales in Fukushima Prefecture, following such municipalities as Naraha and Katsurao. The number of local residents affected by the latest move is more than 10,000, higher than in any previous instance.

Residents of such municipalities in the prefecture as Iitate, Tomioka and Namie have yet to be allowed to return to their homes. But the central government plans to lift evacuation orders on all areas of the

prefecture excluding "difficult-to-return zones," where levels of radiation remain dangerously high, by March 2017.

The longer people in disaster-affected areas live as evacuees, the more difficult it becomes for them to rebuild their lives.

The lifting of an evacuation order based on the progress that has been made in decontaminating polluted areas and restoring damaged infrastructure will give local residents an opportunity for a fresh start. In Minami-Soma, residents who have been hoping to restart their former lives have already returned to their homes. Various organizations are expanding their activities in the city to help rebuild the local communities.

In previous cases, however, only 10 to 20 percent of the residents said they would immediately return to where they lived before the catastrophic accident occurred.

In addition to residents who have decided to move to other parts of the nation, there are also many people who find it difficult to return home for the time being due to reasons related to employment, education, nursing care and other factors. Some people want to wait a while longer to see how their communities will be revived.

Sooner or later, all evacuees will face the choice of returning or migrating.

For both groups, measures to support their efforts to rebuild their livelihoods should be worked out. But support should also be provided to people who cannot make up their minds yet.

A situation where evacuees are under strong pressure to make their decisions quickly should be avoided.

Take the issue of compensation paid to local residents in affected areas, for example. Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant, is paying 100,000 yen (\$945) of compensation per month to each of the people affected. But the utility's cash payments are scheduled to be terminated in March 2018.

A time limit has also been set for the company's compensation to people who have seen their incomes fall or disappear in the aftermath of the disaster.

Excessive dependence on compensation could hamper the efforts of evacuees to restart their lives.

But there are people who have no prospects of returning to their lives before the accident and therefore have no choice but to depend entirely on a monthly payment from the utility.

A way should be found to keep compensating those who really need the money for a certain period after evacuation orders are lifted, according to the circumstances of individual evacuees.

One idea worth serious consideration is the establishment by lawyers and other experts of a neutral organization to assess the circumstances of evacuees for this purpose. This is an approach modeled on the standard procedures for out-of-court dispute settlements.

The concept of "residents" should also be reconsidered. There are many evacuees who have decided to move to other areas but still wish to maintain their hometown ties. These people say they want to return home someday or to get involved in rebuilding their communities in some way.

Scholars have offered ideas to respect their wishes. One would allow them to have a dual certificate of residence for both their previous and current addresses. Another would permit them to become involved in the efforts to rebuild their hometowns while living in other areas.

These ideas can be useful not just for the reconstruction of disaster-stricken areas but also for the revitalization of depopulated rural areas around the nation.

Reviving communities that have been ravaged by the nuclear disaster will inevitably be an unprecedented and long-term process, which requires flexible thinking.

--The Asahi Shimbun, July 15

Luring people back

July 24, 2016

Fukushima banks hope to lure nuclear evacuees back by reopening branches

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/07/24/business/fukushima-banks-hope-to-lure-nuclear-evacuees-back-by-reopening-branches/#.V5SVwaJdeov>

JJI

FUKUSHIMA – Regional banks in Fukushima Prefecture are reopening outlets in radiation-contaminated areas to help lure residents back more than five years after the triple core meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant laid waste to the region in March 2011.

Residents have been slow to return despite the phased lifting of evacuation orders in cleaned-up areas, so regional banks are eager to play a trailblazing role by allowing residents to use their branches as places to socialize.

Abukuma Shinkin Bank, based in Minamisoma, reopened its Odaka branch there in March 2013 and the branch in the town of Namie on July 12.

The evacuation order for the central part of Namie is expected to be lifted by the end of next March, but there are still structures that collapsed from the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake.

“We’ll put the light on in the town where people do not live,” said Yoshihiro Ota, president of Abukuma Shinkin, stressing the significance of reopening the Namie branch.

Abukuma Shinkin became the first financial institution to reopen a branch in Namie, which sits next to the town of Futaba, one of the two municipalities that host the crippled Fukushima No. 1 plant, which lost all power after being swamped by tsunami spawned by the temblor. The plant is run by Tokyo Electric Power Co. Holdings Inc.

“We hope our branch, where local people can stop by freely and enjoy chatting, will become a place that can console them,” said Takahiro Abe, chief of the Namie branch.

“Being the first to reopen a branch in the town will hopefully allow us to attract people and see rises in deposits and loans,” Abe added.

In April, Toho Bank, based in the city of Fukushima, restarted its branch in Naraha, another town close to the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

Although the evacuation order for Naraha was lifted last September, only 8.1 percent of its residents had returned as of July 4.

“Financial institutions are indispensable regional infrastructure,” said Hiroshi Yamaka, chief of Toho Bank’s Naraha branch. “Regional banks have a major role to play in helping residents return home.”

But it is not easy to achieve industrial revival in contaminated areas neglected by the long evacuation.

A male business owner who visited Abukuma Shinkin’s Namie branch on the day it reopened said, “The bank told me that they will lend me money, but I can’t decide on new investment because I’m old and there’s no one I can hand over my business to.”

First summer festival In Naraha since disaster

July 30, 2016

Summer festival in town near Fukushima plant

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160730_21/

A town near the damaged Fukushima nuclear plant has held its first summer festival in 6 years.

Naraha Town was one of the communities ordered by the central government to evacuate after the 2011 nuclear accident. The evacuation order was lifted last September.

The summer festival on Saturday featured performances by local musical bands and traditional arts on a stage set up in a park overlooking the ocean.

In the nearly one year since the evacuation order was lifted, fewer than 10 percent of the 7,300 residents have returned to the town. But many residents who are still living in temporary housing outside the town attended the festival.

Iodine jelly for babies

August 1, 2016

Iodine jelly for infants to be stocked up for nuclear disasters

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201608010008.html>

By TAKASHI SUGIMOTO/ Staff Writer



Tubes of stable iodine jelly for newborns up to a month old (Provided by Nichi-Iko Pharmaceutical Co.)

Tubes of stable iodine jelly for newborns up to a month old (Provided by Nichi-Iko Pharmaceutical Co.)

Tubes of stable iodine jelly for infants, which would prevent radioactive iodine from being absorbed into their systems, will be stockpiled for emergencies in municipalities near nuclear power plants around Japan.

The government will start distributing 300,000 doses of emergency iodine stock to the municipalities in a 30-kilometer radius from the nuclear plants for use in the event of major nuclear accidents, the Cabinet Office announced July 13.

There are about 115,000 infants under the age of 3 in those municipalities.

Previously, the emergency plan had called for feeding iodine to infants after evacuation by pharmacists dissolving iodine powder with syrup. However, the procedure has been reviewed as the protective measure could come too late for infants, whose thyroids are more susceptible to even small doses of radioactive iodine.

The new iodine supply for infants is strawberry-flavored jelly in a tube. It can be dissolved in hot water or milk to feed newborns. The efficacy is the same as ordinary iodine tablets, and it has a shelf life of three years.

Nichi-Iko Pharmaceutical Co. in Toyama has started production of the lot after receiving an order from the government. The government will provide financial support for the municipalities to stock up on the volume of jellies they need.

The distribution will start in September and is scheduled to be completed before the end of fiscal 2016.

Gov't evacuation guidelines worry local governments



Workers clean up a bus that transported evacuees in a nuclear disaster evacuation drill in Shizuoka in February. (Asahi Shimbun file photo)

August 3, 2016

Nuclear disaster evacuation plans worry many local authorities

By ATSUSHI SHINGEN/ Staff Writer

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201608030068.html>

Nearly half of local governments polled are concerned about the recommendation that residents living within 5 to 30 kilometers of a nuclear power plant should “evacuate” by staying indoors if a serious accident occurs, an Asahi Shimbun survey found.

The survey also showed that a quarter of local governments want a review of the central government’s evacuation guidelines, which were set in October 2012 following the Fukushima nuclear disaster the previous year.

It was taken to find how local governments hosting a nuclear facility or located in the vicinity of a nuclear plant view the guidelines in light of the recent series of earthquakes in Kumamoto Prefecture.

In the quakes that began in mid-April, a large number of homes, as well as roads and other structures, were damaged. Continuing aftershocks added to difficulties in victims’ abilities to evacuate quickly.

The nuclear disaster evacuation guidelines were compiled on the assumption of a serious accident occurring at a nuclear complex, but do not take into account the destruction of evacuation routes, bridges and other buildings in the surrounding area, caused by a powerful earthquake, for example.

Shiga Prefecture, which called for a review of the guidelines in May, said: “Indoor evacuation would be unrealistic if a nuclear accident were coupled with an earthquake. Evacuation to the area beyond 30 km should be considered.”

Under the current setup, people living within a 5-km radius are ordered to evacuate immediately.

Those within a radius of 5 to 30 km are advised in principle to stay indoors initially and evacuate in stages, depending on the amount of radiation released into their neighborhoods.

“Indoor evacuation” for such a zone is aimed at allowing the smooth evacuation of people in the 5-km zone first to avoid an expected gridlock.

But many local governments are wary of the central government’s recommendations, citing the possibility of a complex disaster involving more than just a nuclear accident, according to the survey.

The survey, conducted in mid-June and mid-July, covered 21 prefectural governments and 135 municipalities that fall within the 5-30 km radius. All the local governments responded but one, the Fukui prefectural government.

Of the total of 155, The Asahi Shimbun analyzed the responses of 151, as the remaining four municipalities replied that they will evacuate immediately. Most of these municipalities’ jurisdictions are also situated within the 5 km radius.

The survey showed that 71 local governments, including Niigata and Ibaraki prefectures, expressed concerns about the guidelines, while 22 replied that they are not.

Asked to choose one or more reasons for their anxiety, 56 cited the response to a situation where a large number of structures are destroyed.

As for the need to review the guidelines, 37 respondents, including Nagasaki and Shizuoka prefectures, agreed while 13 did not. Sixty-four said they don’t know.

According to the survey, 12 local governments replied that they are well prepared with regard to the infrastructure that enables smooth evacuation, whereas 69 cited problems with that issue.

How to evacuate in a nuclear accident that could be triggered by a devastating earthquake or another disaster that destroys homes and infrastructure has emerged as a pressing issue since the Kumamoto temblors.

Kagoshima’s new governor, Satoshi Mitazono, was elected in July on his campaign pledge to review the existing evacuation plan in connection with a hypothetical accident at the Sendai nuclear power plant. The nuclear power station in Satsuma-Sendai in the prefecture is the only plant online in the nation and is situated relatively close to an active fault that is believed to have slipped in the Kumamoto quakes.

Despite growing concerns voiced by local governments, the Nuclear Regulation Authority’s secretariat, which compiled the guidelines, said in an interview with The Asahi Shimbun that it will not consider a review.

“Indoor evacuation will not be for a prolonged period,” said an official. “Gyms and other public facilities would be available for residents even if their homes were destroyed.”

The official also said local governments can improve their evacuation plans based on their understanding of local conditions.

Home at last, but

August 5, 2016

Home at last, but little joy as evacuee picks up pieces of her life

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201608050001.html>

By MASAKAZU HONDA/ Staff Writer

MINAMI-SOMA, Fukushima Prefecture--It was no ordinary homecoming for Tomoko Kobayashi, after an enforced absence of more than five years due to the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

She says she is "in no mood for celebration" given the daunting task facing her: having to start from scratch at the traditional ryokan inn that has been in the family for nearly 70 years.

The community that Kobayashi had called home was overrun with rats, wild boar and palm civets, and she struggled to protect the family business from that nightmare.

Kobayashi's journey home to start afresh took her via Ukraine, which she visited in 2013 to learn how victims of the world's worst nuclear accident--the Chernobyl disaster in 1986--were coping after all those years.

Kobayashi, 63, was shocked by the different approach authorities there had taken compared with that of Japan.

She said Ukraine takes a more cautious approach toward radiation risks.

Kobayashi returned to Minami-Soma's Odaka district on July 12 after the central government lifted a ban for 11,000 or so evacuees from the district, which is within a 20-kilometer radius of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Her initial concern is living with low-level radiation.

She also worries for her future and whether she can get the business up and running. With her husband, Takenori, 67, Kobayashi has reopened Futabaya ryokan. The inn that she took over from her mother 10 years ago has 15 guest rooms and is located in front of JR Odaka Station, which is 16 km from the plant. Another of her concerns centers on whether her return home to reopen the inn could play into the hands of the authorities.

"The central government is eager to wind up the program that compensates the victims," she said, alluding to a sense that evacuees are being encouraged to return so that financial redress can end.

On the plus side, the radiation level in her neighborhood has dropped to below 0.2 microsievert per hour. Although it is three times the level before the triple meltdown in March 2011, the figure is significantly lower than in the immediate aftermath.

Since the disaster, Kobayashi has closely monitored the radioactivity of food, drinking water and soil by working with a local citizens group. In one instance, radioactivity registered more than 10,000 becquerels per kilogram when she measured the levels of the dust and dirt sucked up in a vacuum cleaner at her home.

Returning home means she still faces the risk of exposure to long-term, low radiation. How this could affect her health is not understood by scientists.

Odaka was previously designated a "zone in preparation for the lifting of the evacuation order," where an annual radiation dose is estimated at 20 millisieverts or below.

Extensive decontamination work over the past three years paved the way for the evacuees' return.

Despite the lifting of the ban, only 10 to 20 percent of the residents from Odaka and other parts of Minami-Soma are expected to go back.

Evacuees are reluctant because of the potential hazard of the long-term, low radiation exposure and the new living and social networks built during the five years they were away.

They are also wary of the risks of moving back in the vicinity of the nuclear complex where the unprecedented scale of work to decommission the damaged reactors is under way amid a host of challenges, including an accumulated buildup of highly radioactive water.

Before the nuclear accident, Kobayashi had a staff of five that washed and starched the linen. It was a hallmark of her ryokan's hospitality. With only one staffer coming back, however, Kobayashi has to forgo the starched sheets.

At one point, more than 60,000 of the city's 72,000 residents evacuated, including those who left voluntarily.

After she moved into temporary housing in Minami-Soma in 2012, Kobayashi occasionally visited the inn to clean up. The dark waters of the tsunami, spawned by the magnitude-9.0 tremor on March 11, 2011, almost reached the front door of her ryokan, even though it is situated 3 km from the coast.

Her neighborhood, which was blessed with a wide array of edible wild plants, mushrooms and freshwater fish, was transformed into a "gray ghost town." The landscape became increasingly bleaker as gardens of homes were occupied by piles of black plastic bales containing radioactive waste from the cleanup operation.

Kobayashi had many sleepless nights. She wondered whether she could ever pick up the threads of the existence she led before the catastrophe.

Her turning point came in September 2013 when she joined a tour to the region in Ukraine devastated by the Chernobyl accident.

"I was curious to know how victims of a nuclear accident considered more serious than Fukushima's are faring nowadays," Kobayashi said.

Kobayashi also wanted to convey her gratitude to those affected by the Chernobyl explosion in Zhytomyr province for sending 150 dosimeters to Minami-Soma. The devices proved to be invaluable at a time when the city badly needed them.

When her tour group visited Zhytomyr, the residents there shared their experiences and answered questions sincerely.

What struck Kobayashi during the trip was the disparity between Ukraine's local government and Japanese authorities in their handling of radiation risks and programs made available to help the victims. In Ukraine, authorities are more hands-on.

"No Trespassing" and other warning signs were put up in communities, although their doses of radiation were lower than that in Odaka. Ukraine authorities issued a warning on the basis of radioactive contamination in the ground as it could lead to internal radiation exposure of residents through the spread of radioactive dust.

She also learned that a large number of people in Zhytomyr have developed health problems, not just cancer, but also a wide variety of diseases.

But they are guaranteed by law the right to receive treatment or to take refuge.

That is in sharp contrast with the Japanese government briefings with evacuees, which barely touched on the long-term, low radiation risks.

Kobayashi is outraged by this.

"The Japanese government steered displaced people toward their return by repeating that an annual exposure of up to 20 millisieverts poses little health risk," she said.

Kobayashi said she would have been less suspicious of the intention of Japanese officials if they had candidly admitted that they didn't know about the possible effects on health.

She is also angered about the way authorities treated evacuees in light of the July 12 lifting of the ban. Evacuees from Minami-Soma's Kawabusa district, a mountainous area that fell in the "residence restriction zone," were also allowed to return. The zone is defined as one registering an estimated annual dose of between 20 to 50 millisieverts.

Although a dose in Kawabusa was confirmed to have dropped to less than 20 millisieverts, the clearance came as a surprise to many locals since it ran counter to the government's previous policy of designating such an area first a zone in preparation for the lifting.

Kawabusa is home to about 300 people, including many children.

Despite a drop in radiation readings in her community, Kobayashi said she cannot ask her grandchildren, who are 8 and 2, to come visit her and her husband yet.

But she is determined to make an effort for rebuilding.

"I don't know how many more years it will take to bring back the happy sounds of children to our community, but I am determined to do what I can do now," Kobayashi said.

According to the JAIF

August 3, 2016

Radioactive Concentrations In Fukushima Fish 'Below Reference Levels For First Time Since Accident'

<http://www.nucnet.org/all-the-news/2016/08/03/radioactive-concentrations-in-fukushima-fish-below-reference-levels-for-first-time-since-accident>

Unplanned Events & Incidents

3 Aug (NucNet): Radioactive caesium concentrations in marine products caught offshore in Fukushima Prefecture were less than the reference value of 100 becquerel /kg during the fiscal year ending March 2016 – the first time since the March 2011 Fukushima-Daiichi accident that the reference value was not exceeded in any item, local authorities have said. **According to the Japan Atomic Industrial Forum (Jaif)** the reference value was provisionally set at 500bq/kg for common food items in March 2011 and reduced to the 100bq/kg in April 2012. Radioactive caesium concentrations in all 8,438 products tested were less than this level, Jaif said. The value for common foods issued by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC), a source for international food standards, is 1,000bq/kg, Jaif said. Authorities said caesium levels at Fukushima were below the limit of detection in 7,702 products, accounting for 91.27% of the total. This was the first time more than 90% of the products have been below the detection level, Jaif said. The sea area subject to the prefecture's examinations is a 20-km area from the Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear station. The area inside the port is not included in the examinations. Jaif said that as of 25 July 2016, shipments of 21 kinds of fish are still suspended by the national government.

Should Hong Kong lift ban on Fukushima food?

August 12, 2016

Japan urges Hong Kong to lift ban on food from areas near Fukushima plant

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/08/12/business/japan-urges-h-k-lift-ban-food-areas-near-fukushima-plant/#.V7AkH6Jdeos>

Kyodo

HONG KONG – Agricultural minister Yuji Yamamoto said in Hong Kong on Thursday that he has requested the territory to lift a food ban that restricts imports from five Japanese prefectures most affected by a radiation-leak scare following the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011.

Imports of Japanese food, including milk, vegetables and fruits, from Fukushima, Ibaraki, Tochigi, Gunma and Chiba prefectures have been banned since March 2011 following the magnitude-9 earthquake and subsequent tsunami that led to the nuclear plant meltdowns over worries about contamination by radioactive substances.

However, meat, poultry, eggs and aquatic products can be imported with radiation certificates stating their safety.

“I made a request to (Chief Secretary for Administration Carrie Lam during a meeting Wednesday), if the regulation on the import of food from Japan could be relaxed and be eliminated,” Yamamoto told media at the opening of the annual Food Expo, where a record number of more than 250 Japanese companies are in Hong Kong promoting their products, including those from the prefectures of Fukushima and Kumamoto, which was hit by a series of earthquakes in April.

“(On Friday) I should have a meeting with Secretary for Food and Health Ko Wing-man. I expect that they will respond after very careful consideration and deliberation,” he said, adding that he wishes there could be a scientific-based analysis of products from Fukushima to eliminate the reputational damage.

Ko said monitoring will remain for the safety of Hong Kong people.

“We have been relying on a risk- and evidence-based method to decide on the prohibition of fresh food imports from five Japanese prefectures,” Ko told reporters after touring the food fair. “We have continued to examine the progress made in Japan’s handling of the Fukushima nuclear incident,” including the measures they have put in place and test results on the food, he said.

“We will look at all the information and make decisions on a scientific basis. In the upcoming meeting (with Yamamoto), we will explain to them Hong Kong’s position, which, most importantly, is that we will manage food safety based on the well-being of Hong Kong people,” he said.

The value of Japan’s agricultural, forestry and fishery exports last year reached a record-high ¥745 billion (\$7.34 billion). Hong Kong remained the top destination for the 11th consecutive year, with a value of ¥179 billion, marking a 33 percent increase from 2014, according to ministry data.

The sale of dried sea cucumber, considered a healthy seafood delicacy, to Hong Kong registered a slight decline, while sales of instant noodles increased by 50 percent, which Yamamoto said was a “major surprise.”

Eliza Au, 40, owner of a startup private kitchen, said after sampling products from Kumamoto Prefecture she is confident in the quality of Japanese food.

“The fruit, the Wagyu beef, all went under strict safety inspections, and the seasoning, the mix and match are all so appealing,” Au said.

The food fair, which showcases some 1,400 exhibitors from 26 countries and regions, will run through Monday.

Missing patient: TEPCO must pay



Beds are scattered on the premises of Futaba Hospital in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, following evacuation orders in 2011. (Asahi Shimbun file photo)

August 11, 2016

TEPCO ordered to pay 22 mil yen over dementia patient missing in Fukushima crisis

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160811/p2a/00m/0na/008000c>

The Tokyo District Court ordered Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) on Aug. 10 to pay about 22 million yen in compensation to the family of a dementia patient who went missing from a hospital shortly after the outbreak of the disaster at TEPCO's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

A woman with dementia, an in-patient at Futaba Hospital in the Fukushima Prefecture town of Okuma near the nuclear plant, went missing a few days after the outbreak of the nuclear crisis on March 11, 2011. She was 88 years old at that time. The family of the woman demanded TEPCO pay 44 million yen in compensation.

Handing down the ruling, Presiding Judge Yuko Mizuno said, "If the accident hadn't occurred, hospital staff would have been able to keep a close eye on the woman because they wouldn't have had to evacuate."

According to a lawyer for the plaintiffs, it is the first judicial ruling that has recognized a causal relationship between the Fukushima nuclear disaster and a missing person case.

TEPCO has broadly admitted responsibility for the deaths of hospital patients during the evacuation of the areas around the nuclear plant. But in the case of the dementia patient, the utility has denied any responsibility to pay compensation and fought a court battle against the woman's family, arguing that "the causal relationship between the accident and the missing woman cannot be recognized." The woman was declared missing and legally dead by a court in 2013.

According to the latest ruling, it was confirmed that the woman was in the hospital on the afternoon of March 14, 2011, but her whereabouts have been unknown since. The Tokyo District Court assumed in the ruling that the woman had died after going out the front door of the hospital, which Self-Defense Forces personnel used to rescue patients and other people after hospital staff evacuated. The court judged that hospital staff would have been able to prevent the woman from leaving if the nuclear accident had not occurred, stating, "Hospital staff were paying close attention to the risk of patients going outside in ordinary times."

The woman's family demanded 40 million yen in consolation money. But as with the four other lawsuits (already finalized) filed with the Tokyo District Court against TEPCO by the families of patients at the hospital who died in the wake of the nuclear disaster, the court deemed about 20 million yen appropriate - about the same amount for a road traffic death. In those four cases, the court then reduced the amounts of compensation by 20 to 40 percent due to the patients' chronic ailments. However, in the ruling on the dementia patient, the court ordered TEPCO to pay the full amount, saying, "The woman died as a result of the emergence of exceptional circumstances which made it impossible for hospital staff to provide assistance to or keep an eye on the woman, because of the (nuclear) accident and because local residents left."

Fumio Shinkai, a lawyer for the plaintiffs, said in a statement, "The court respectfully recognized the causal relationship. When it comes to thinking of the feelings of the family who cannot even see the body (of the woman), it is regrettable that the amount of compensation we insisted on has not been accepted." The woman's 71-year-old niece, who lives in Saitama Prefecture, said, "I sometimes think that she may be living somewhere even today, but the case has been resolved for me psychologically as TEPCO's responsibility was recognized. I think my aunt is also satisfied."

TEPCO must pay family of woman who vanished in Fukushima crisis

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201608110045.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

A court ordered Tokyo Electric Power Co. to pay 22 million yen (\$216,000) in compensation to the family of an 88-year-old woman with dementia who disappeared after the Fukushima nuclear crisis unfolded in 2011.

The woman, who was a patient at a hospital near TEPCO's stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, was never seen again.

"Staff at her hospital continued to keep a sufficient watch over her even after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami struck, and her disappearance could have been avoided if the nuclear accident had not occurred," Presiding Judge Yuko Mizuno said in her ruling on Aug. 10 at the Tokyo District Court. The court ruling is the first to acknowledge a causal relation between the disappearance of an individual and the disaster at the Fukushima nuclear plant that started on March 11, 2011, according to the plaintiff's lawyers.

The woman's family sought 44 million yen in compensation.

"I am relieved that the case has been resolved," the woman's 84-year-old brother, who is one of the plaintiffs, said.

The woman had been hospitalized for dementia at Futaba Hospital in Okuma, a town that co-hosts the nuclear complex.

Staff members confirmed she was at the hospital until March 14, two days after Okuma residents were ordered to evacuate.

But when members of the Self-Defense Forces rushed to the site and completed the relocation of hospital inpatients on March 16, the woman was missing.

A subsequent search failed to find her, and her body has not been found. She was legally declared dead in September 2013, a year after her family reported her disappearance.

TEPCO argued that "the confusion stemming from the quake and tsunami is primarily responsible for her disappearance, not the nuclear accident."

But the court rejected that argument.

"The director and staff members took extra care to keep her from going out accidentally because she had a tendency to wander around," the ruling said. "They could have continued to pay attention to her if they had not been forced to evacuate because of the nuclear accident."

The court said the woman "is believed to have died after continuing to loiter in the area after people vacated the site."

Following the court's decision, TEPCO released a statement that said, "We will examine the details of the ruling and continue to make a sincere response."

The woman was a patient at the hospital for four-and-a-half years, and her brother visited her every month.

Her family held her funeral in 2014 without her remains.

"If her remains are found, we will hold a proper burial," the brother said.

(This article was compiled from reports by Odaka Chiba and Mana Nagano.)

Five years to get rid off radioactivity...

August 18, 2016

LDP sets goal of lifting evacuation orders near Fukushima plant in 5 years

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160818/p2a/00m/0na/021000c>

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) on Aug. 17 decided on a target of lifting evacuation orders for radioactively contaminated areas near the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant in the next five years, with the goal to be combined with proposals from Komeito and put forward to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe within the month.

The plan would create "recovery bases" in each of the municipalities that are currently still off-limits due to contamination from the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant meltdowns. Until this month no policy had been put forward by the national government on how to handle the decontamination of the so-called "difficult-to-return" areas and the return of evacuees, but on Aug. 5 the LDP and Komeito gave a draft of the policies to the governments of these municipalities.

Under the policies, the parties propose that the municipal governments meet with the prefectural government and create plans for setting up the recovery bases. The national government would then evaluate the plans. The current "difficult-to-return" areas would not be redefined before having their evacuation orders lifted.

A draft outline of the proposal that will be made to the prime minister was also shown. It included a suggestion to transfer to interim storage facilities an amount of contaminated soil equivalent to the amount at homes and schools in affected areas by fiscal 2020.

Govt subsidies for Fukushima farmers

August 23, 2016

Government subsidies to help Fukushima farmers restart operations

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/08/23/national/state-subsidies-works-help-fukushima-farmers-restart-operations/#.V7v6NqJdeos>

Jiji

The central government plans to set up a new subsidy system to help farmers in 12 municipalities near the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant restart their operations, according to sources.

The program represents part of the government's efforts to promote the reconstruction of areas damaged by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami in the Tohoku region and the subsequent meltdowns at the Tokyo Electric Power Co. nuclear station.

The government will earmark around ¥7 billion for the program under a planned supplementary budget for its special account related to the 2011 disaster, the sources said Monday.

The program will help farmers buy equipment and livestock.

A support system is already available in which the 12 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture buy facilities and equipment such as greenhouses and tractors and lend them for free to farmers aiming to get back on their feet.

But the system is inconvenient for individuals who want to resume farming operations, because it is mainly designed for group farming and other big operations. Also, approval from local assemblies is necessary to lend out the facilities and gear.

Under the new program, the Fukushima Prefectural Government will cover 75 percent of farmers' purchase costs for farming equipment and livestock, the sources said. The upper limit on support per farmer will likely be ¥10 million, they said.

The central government will shoulder all costs incurred by prefectural government, the sources said.

The 12 municipalities are **Tamura, Minamisoma, Kawamata, Hirono, Naraha, Tomioka, Okuma, Futaba, Namie, Kawauchi, Katsurao and Iitate.**

Sometimes referendums do work

August 18, 2016

Former town mayor recalls town referendum that booted plans for nuclear plant

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/08/18/national/former-town-mayor-recalls-town-referendum-booted-plans-nuclear-plant/#.V7WdM6Jdeos>

JJI

NIIGATA – Residents of the town of Maki, Niigata Prefecture, made the right decision 20 years ago, according to Takaaki Sasaguchi.

The town was Japan's first ever to hold a referendum over a plan to build a nuclear power plant and firmly knocked it down.

"I'm proud that we opened our future through the referendum," the former town mayor, 68, said in an interview. "Our choice not to allow a nuclear plant to be built in our town was not wrong."

Maki no longer exists as a discrete entity as it has since been absorbed into the city of Niigata.

But memories run strong of what people power achieved, and in light of the Fukushima disaster what it may have prevented.

In 1971, Tohoku Electric Power Co. unveiled plans to construct a nuclear plant in the town. The facility was to generate electricity from a central 825,000-kw reactor of boiling-water design.

But as land appropriation and other work got underway, opposition strengthened.

Sasaguchi and his colleagues set up a group aimed at holding a referendum so that residents could decide for themselves.

He was elected mayor in January 1996, and the Maki government then established a municipal ordinance for a referendum.

Referendum day was Aug. 4 that year, and 12,478 residents voted against the plan. Those in favor totaled 7,904.

Voter turnout was 88.29 percent in Japan's first local referendum over a nuclear power station.

Following the result, Mayor Sasaguchi decided to reject the nuclear plant construction, and a plot of land that the town owned within the proposed site was sold off to residents who had opposed the plans.

Those in favor of the plant sued, but in December 2003 they lost the case and later that month Tohoku Electric threw in the towel.

Sasaguchi accuses Japan's government of not encouraging respect for local voices back then.

A pro-nuclear push made it difficult for Maki residents to speak up.

"The most important thing in the referendum was that residents showed their intentions and made a choice," Sasaguchi recalls.

The referendum result drew heavy media coverage, and the town was praised for choosing the democratic process.

Sasaguchi says it also brought the town together.

"I think Maki residents probably wanted to bring their town, which had been upset by the nuclear project, back to being a normal community," he said.

The town was merged into the city of Niigata in 2005, and the referendum began to be forgotten.

However, the March 2011 nuclear crisis in neighboring Fukushima Prefecture reminded ex-Maki residents of the significance of their vote back in 2006.

They told Sasaguchi the same tragedy could have happened to them if they had allowed a nuclear plant to be built.

Meanwhile, Sasaguchi notes that Tokyo Electric Power Co. has filed for Nuclear Regulation Authority safety checks for two of the seven reactors at its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power station in Niigata Prefecture.

"Even if the NRA endorses the safety, the issue of the nuclear waste disposal site remains unresolved," he said.

The central government still has not identified a long-term disposal site for high-level waste.

"The Japanese government should put into force a policy that doesn't depend on nuclear power plants as soon as possible," he said.

The Fukushima shock

Background: August 31, 2016

Sometimes, when politicians are out of government, they seem to see things with clearer eyes. Here are Stéphane Dion's striking comments about the Fukushima tragedy in October 2014, when his party (the Liberal Party of Canada) was in opposition -- and not even the "official" opposition! No mention of Canadian or American reactors, though. Or that Japan's reactors were of American design,

Gordon Edwards.

The Fukushima Shock

By Stéphane Dion, National Newswatch, Oct 24 2014

<http://tinyurl.com/zghov4t>

Stéphane Dion was Canada's Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs between 1996 and 2003, and Minister of Environment for 2004-2005. He is currently [August 2016] Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs (since November 4, 2015).

Seeing Fukushima's evacuated area is quite a shock. It is one thing to imagine it, another to see the consequences of the nuclear disaster with your own eyes.

Imagine: your home, your car, your property, your neighbourhood suddenly becoming forbidden areas. You are not allowed to go there except perhaps for an hour or two, from time to time. Although the surrounding woods are as green and the ocean as blue as ever, an invisible blanket of death covers everything. You can't feel it, you can't smell it but it is there and will be for decades, perhaps longer. Going back home would put your health at risk. You are not even sure you escaped the danger zone in time. You fear for your family's as well as your own health. The specter of cancer haunts you constantly. What does the future hold for you? Leukemia? Thyroid cancer? A deformed baby?

If you are allowed to stay home – because your neighbourhood is deemed to be distant enough from the danger zone – you are warned to not let your children play outdoors. Arenas are being built and designated for that purpose.

Your daughter is heartbroken: she was going to marry a young man from another area but the wedding has been cancelled – an irradiated mother-to-be is not wanted.

You are a farmer but are not allowed to sell your produce, now unfit for human consumption.

You are a fisherman but the area where you once casted your nets is now banned.

Those are but a few of the multiple aspects of the nightmare being lived by the denizens of Fukushima Prefecture, Northern Japan. On March 11, 2011, a magnitude 9 earthquake triggered a huge tsunami that threw fifteen meter waves at the region, claiming 1,599 lives, destroying everything in its path and causing a nuclear accident of a magnitude unequalled since the 1986 Chernobyl disaster. Three reactors suffered a catastrophic meltdown and a fourth was damaged, spewing radiation in the atmosphere and ocean and contaminating a 30,000 square kilometer area – 8 percent of Japan's total land area. As a result

of that nuclear disaster, 300,000 Fukushima Prefecture residents were evacuated. 130,000 are still forbidden to go home.

I met some of those families while in Japan from September 30 to October 8, 2014, when I was invited by the Swiss section of the Green Cross to take stock of the consequences of the Fukushima nuclear disaster. The Green Cross was founded in 1993 by Mikhail Gorbachev, following the Rio Summit. It is active in some thirty countries and one of its many noteworthy features is the attention it pays to environmental safety and security – including victims of nuclear accidents. The Green Cross is very involved in Fukushima, helping the displaced families as best it can.

The Swiss section of the Green Cross gathered some thirty environmentalists and political figures from America, Europe and Asia to study the consequences of the Fukushima disaster. We travelled to a section of the evacuated area, the *Resident Restriction Zone*, taking all necessary precautions. The most dangerous area, the *No Return Zone*, cannot be visited – no decontamination has been done there. On a supposedly decontaminated street in the small town of Tomioka, we were told to get back on the bus after ten minutes because the radiation level was too high. We visited abandoned houses and businesses and witnessed the ongoing decontamination work which employs five to six thousand workers every day. Safety and security rules are two to five times stricter than those that were put in place by the Russian, Bielorrussian and Ukrainian authorities following the Chernobyl accident. Cancer cases have been identified but direct causal links with the nuclear accident may not even be identifiable before 2016.

The scientists who spoke to us on the health impacts of radiation are not all of the same mind on the issue, even though these impacts have been studied since the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings. But assuming we accept their most optimistic assessments, what does it change? Even if you are told that the radiation might be less harmful, less likely to induce cancer in the long term than what had previously been believed, **would you wholeheartedly accept to live in an irradiated region?**

When the authorities distribute pamphlets in schools explaining that radiation is not that much of a problem, they raise more controversy than they provide reassurance. So people seek information on their own. They talk about the relative harmfulness of caesium 137, cobalt 60, plutonium 239, strontium 90... However, as it stands, psychosocial impacts have killed more people than radiation: some 1,660 lives have been lost to posttraumatic stress disorder, chronic anxiety, depression, family dislocation, precarious living conditions, displacement and suicide resulting from evacuation.

We met with the Fukushima region local authorities and Members of Parliament from the ruling party in Tokyo. We were told about the measures that have been taken to help and compensate displaced persons, and to carry out food and drinking water inspection, site decontamination, radiation level monitoring and management of fast accumulating radioactive wastes and contaminated soil.

The cooling water used in the Daiichi plant reactors needs to be stored somewhere. It is estimated that if all goes well, some thirty years will be needed to remove the radioactive fuel from the reactors. In the meantime, a way must be found to prevent the fuel from leaking again into the ground and ocean. All that calls for highly trained personnel and huge expenses including, paradoxically, for electrical power. But to what avail? **Some municipal representatives told us that the technology is not up to par and that radioactive leaks continue to happen, contaminating the Pacific Ocean waters and fish stocks.**

Interim solutions are still being applied to a problem that will be around for decades and risks affecting many neighbouring populations in Japan and elsewhere.

Following the Fukushima accident, Japan shut down its 54 nuclear reactors. These accounted for over a quarter (29 percent) of Japan's electrical power production. This energy source had to be replaced with wind and solar energy but above all, by imported hydrocarbons – natural gas and coal. A consequence of this increased reliance on hydrocarbons is that Japan, which had committed to a 25% *reduction* of its

greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 compared to 1990 levels, now forecasts a 3 percent *increase*. The Members of Parliament I met told me that the Japanese Government will not commit to a new reduction target for 2030 until the future of nuclear energy is settled.

It costs almost as much to keep the nuclear plants dormant as when they were running. For the time being, the government is thinking of restarting two nuclear reactors in Southern Japan, based on what it believes to be an extremely prudent and thorough scientific assessment. But quite understandably, that perspective raises much resistance and apprehension in the population.

One of the most unfortunate consequences of the Fukushima disaster is a weakening, in a large segment of Japan's population, of the trust between the people and their government. The Japanese appeared to me as I imagined them: smiling, courteous, hardworking, inventive, disciplined and very respectful of authority.

Historically, in previous occurrences of the type of natural disaster that regularly strikes the country – typhoons, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions – they have viewed the government as a protective father or mother figure. But after the Fukushima nuclear accident, for the first time, the government's good faith has been cast into doubt. Hadn't it promised that such an accident would never happen? The failures of Japan's Nuclear Safety Commission and the now proven falsifications perpetrated by the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) – owner of the power plant – have been pointed out. To avert a panic, the government kept making reassuring statements which were cast into doubt and perceived as a form of manipulation, generating a feeling of resentment and bitterness that is still very strong today.

Yet even in adversity, humour – or at least bitter irony – finds its place. Some Japanese will tell you the story of the TEPCO scientist who, in an attempt to reassure the population, went as far as to declare: "Smiling people are not affected by radiation. Only worried people are. That has been proved in animal testing."

It would be hard to find a country that combines, better than Japan, strong organization skills, individual and collective discipline, social cohesion and technological expertise. Japan thought it was immune to nuclear disaster. Yet it happened, albeit as a result of an unprecedented natural disaster. What country can feel assured that it would have dealt better with the consequences of such a crisis than Japan? When you think that some much less organized or politically stable countries than Japan also want their own nuclear plants, how can you not think that we are rolling the dice? Explosive dice!

Fukushima is here to testify to the damage an overly reckless humankind can inflict on itself. Will we know how to draw the right conclusions?

Building on radioactive soil

August 29, 2016

Couple built home on top of radioactive soil due to inaccurate city sketch

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160829/p2a/00m/0na/011000c>

FUKUSHIMA -- A couple unknowingly built a new home in Fukushima on top of bags containing radioactive soil because they received an inaccurate waste storage sketch created by the Fukushima Municipal Government, it has been learned.

The couple has been unable to remove four flexible container bags of radioactive soil found buried under their home, as doing so could leave their house leaning. They say the city has not apologized.

"Far from admitting responsibility and apologizing, they haven't even tried to examine the site. They have also been reluctant to release information, and have acted extremely insincerely," a statement from the pair said.

The couple initially received a Fukushima Municipal Government sketch showing buried waste on a plot of land they purchased, but it contained no dimensions. About 66,000 similar sketches without dimensions have already been distributed, and it is possible that similar incidents could occur in the future as the storage of waste collected in the wake of the meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant becomes prolonged.

In five Fukushima prefectural municipalities, including the city of Fukushima, contaminated soil collected during decontamination work has mostly been stored onsite, while other local bodies have stored it at interim storage facilities. The city of Fukushima is the only one of the five municipalities to have handed landowners waste storage sketches without any dimensions. Those provided by the other four municipalities show dimensions. When land changes hands, the diagrams are normally handed from the previous landowner to the new one.

In November 2013, a man in Fukushima bought a 300-square-meter plot of decontaminated land, and received a "monitoring chart" from the previous landowner with a diagram showing where radioactive soil was buried, along with radiation measurements taken before and after the decontamination. Based on the diagram, the man built a new home, avoiding the northeast of the plot of land where the waste was shown to be buried.

However, when the city came to dig up the buried waste in October 2015, it was found that six flexible container bags with a total capacity of six cubic meters lay under the northeast part of the new home. Four of them could not be removed due to fears of the home being left leaning.

When the man made an official information request for documents on decontamination in May this year, he was given a diagram containing dimensions. This showed that the waste was buried several dozen centimeters closer to the southwest, nearer the center of the plot of land. The man says the actual burial spot was even further toward the center.

A Fukushima Municipal Government official said the purpose of the diagram without dimensions was to display the amount of radiation, and that the burial spot it showed was only a rough indication. The municipal government said the basis of the diagram with dimensions, on the other hand, was different, being used to record the burial spot of waste under the Act on Special Measures Concerning the Handling of Radioactive Pollution.

A city official commented that the decontaminated soil was supposed to be removed quickly and the officials had not expected it to be there until the time a land transaction was made and a home built. The city is considering replacing about 26,000 diagrams that are due to be distributed with ones that show dimensions. It is also considering publicly informing people that the diagrams that have been issued without dimensions are not accurate indications of where waste is buried.

Only 10% have returned to Nahara

September 5, 2016

10% return to Fukushima town since evacuation order lifted in '15

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201609050042.html>

By AKIFUMI NAGAHASHI/ Staff Writer

NARAHARA, Fukushima Prefecture--Only 10 percent of Naraha residents have returned home near the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant in the year since the evacuation order was lifted, a rate that could threaten the town's survival.

More than half of the returnees are senior citizens, and a vast majority of town's children do not plan to attend school in Naraha next year.

The town set of a goal of having 50 percent of evacuees return home by next spring.

But lingering fears of radiation contamination are keeping many residents away, despite repeated tests effectively showing no danger to health in the town.

"Work is still under way at the plant to prepare for decommissioning, and we are concerned about radiation exposure," said a 67-year-old man who plans to move back to Naraha with his wife. "We cannot encourage our grandchildren to return."

Naraha's population was about 7,300 before the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011.

As of Sept. 2, the number of returnees to the town was 681.

Naraha, most of which lies within a 20-kilometer radius of the plant, was the first of seven municipalities to have its nearly full evacuation order lifted.

The evacuation order for Naraha was lifted on Sept. 5, 2015.

The central and prefectural governments are closely watching how things play out in the town to carry out rebuilding efforts in other affected communities.

The Reconstruction Agency's survey released in March found that more than 50 percent of Naraha evacuees are looking forward to their eventual return home.

"We expect the town's population to go up in steps," said an official with the town's chamber of commerce and industry.

But the official acknowledged that business activities will not be sustainable with only a 10-percent returning rate.

A senior town government official said, "If evacuees stay away, we would have to think about a merger (with other local governments)."

Those aged 65 or older account for 53 percent of Naraha's current population, double the rate in 2010.

A total of about 680 students attended the two elementary schools and one junior high school in the town before the disaster.

Although the three schools are expected to re-open next April, a recent town government survey showed that only about 80 of the eligible 450 children plan to attend school in Naraha.

The average radiation dose in front of the Naraha town hall in July was 0.1 microsievert per hour, almost the same as the average dose near JR Fukushima Station in the prefectural capital, which is far from the crippled plant and was never issued an evacuation order.

The Naraha dose is also lower than 0.23 microsievert per hour, the long-term goal for additional radiation exposure, which excludes background radiation.

Mayor Yukie Matsumoto said he hopes construction of housing and commercial facilities will pave the way for evacuees to move back to their hometown.

"With our expectations, we somewhat inflated the repatriation goal," Matsumoto said. "As housing, commercial and other facilities are put in place, the number of returnees will rise."

The town is working on a project to build a “compact town,” where shops and housing units, as well as a prefectural government-supported clinic, are located within easy access from each other. Costs for the project are covered by grants from the central and prefectural governments. The commercial facility is scheduled to open in spring 2018.

New website to promote Fukushima produce

September 7, 2016

Govt. website to help Fukushima producers

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160907_17/

Japan's Reconstruction Agency is launching a website to promote the sale of farm and marine products from Fukushima Prefecture. Sales have suffered since the accident five years ago at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

The new site is part of efforts to address damage caused by lingering rumors about possible radioactive contamination of goods from the northeastern prefecture.

The agency has asked **a private organization to run the website**. It's scheduled to start on Thursday.

About 80 items of fresh produce and processed foods, including rice wines and fruit juices will be on sale at the website.

The site will offer membership with exclusive access to limited goods. It will also facilitate exchanges between producers and consumers to secure steady demand and help with product development.

The number of products on the site will gradually increase.

Agency officials say they hope this will help expand sales. They say farm and fisheries production in the prefecture remains below the levels prior to the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, which caused the nuclear accident.

3/11 Children's Fund for Thyroid Cancer

September 9, 2016

Fund started to help Fukushima thyroid cancer patients cover expenses

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/09/09/national/fund-started-help-fukushima-thyroid-cancer-patients-cover-expenses/#.V9LNJjVdeos>

by Mizuho Aoki

Staff Writer

A group comprising medical and legal experts announced Friday it has launched a fund to provide financial support to children who were diagnosed with thyroid cancer after the 2011 nuclear meltdowns in Fukushima Prefecture.

The group, named 3/11 Children's Fund for Thyroid Cancer, will start accepting donations from Sept. 20, aiming to raise at least ¥20 million. The amount could provide at least ¥50,000 each for 200 to 400 people, it said.

Donated funds will be used primarily to cover medical expenses for thyroid cancer patients in Fukushima and neighboring prefectures, it said. The group will announce more details in November on the criteria that will be used to determine who is eligible to receive the aid before it starts accepting applications.

"They are struggling to pay medical bills," Hiroyuki Kawai, a lawyer and one of the founding members of the group, said at a news conference in Tokyo. "I don't think ¥50,000 will be enough for them, but they are impoverished and are struggling, and even that amount will be of help."

Currently, the medical expenses of children diagnosed with thyroid cancer in Fukushima Prefecture are covered by the prefectural government.

Patients, however, have to initially pay their medical expenses out of pocket until they start receiving refunds from the prefecture, placing great financial strain on many families, another member of the group said.

In addition to that, **some parents often have to take leave from work to accompany their children** during hospital visits, which also includes paying for **travel expenses**, they said.

According to the group, although medical treatment for thyroid cancer is covered by public health insurance, the patients still have to pay about ¥10,000 per examination and roughly ¥150,000 for surgical procedures. And if patients have to undergo endoscopic surgery, it would cost them an additional ¥300,000, it said.

Since October 2011, the Fukushima government has conducted thyroid screenings for some 380,000 children who were aged 18 or younger.

By the end of March, a total of 173 children were diagnosed with suspected thyroid cancer. Of those, 131 were confirmed to have the cancer after undergoing surgery.

A panel of experts under the prefectural government said in an interim report released in March that those thyroid cancer cases were unlikely to be radiation-induced.

The panel said the amount of radiation released was lower than in the 1986 Chernobyl accident, where more than 6,000 children were diagnosed with the cancer by 2005, and noted that no cancer was found among children aged under 5 at the time of the disaster who are more vulnerable to radiation exposure.

83 species of fish now eligible for test fishing

September 11, 2016

83 species now eligible for test fishing off coast of Fukushima

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201609110002.html>

By KAZUMASA SUGIMURA/ Staff Writer

September 11, 2016 at 10:00 JST

IWAKI, Fukushima Prefecture--Ten species were added to the list of catches eligible for test fishing off the coast of Fukushima Prefecture, but lingering concerns about radiation are keeping sales of such marine products low.

Still, the latest additions, which include the Japanese flounder, the white-spotted conger eel and the spotted halibut, have encouraged fishermen who have been struggling to rebuild their lives since the Fukushima nuclear disaster started in March 2011.

The Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations on Aug. 25 added the 10 species to bring the total number eligible for test fishing to 83. The additions were approved during a meeting in Iwaki of the prefectural council for the rebuilding of regional fisheries.

"I think the 83 fish species accounted for about 70 percent of our pre-disaster hauls," said Tetsu Nozaki, president of the prefectural fisheries federation. "I am placing particularly high hopes for a great boost in the value of our catches from the resumed fishing of Japanese flounder."

Test fishing for flounder started on Sept. 2.

The Soma-Futaba fisheries cooperative association, which is part of the prefectural federation, plans to resume catches of white-spotted conger eel in September. But the Iwaki city fisheries cooperative association has decided to wait until water temperatures are low enough to ensure freshness of the white-spotted conger eel.

Test fishing has expanded because the environment of the sea has significantly improved since the initial impact of the nuclear disaster. Radioactivity levels in fish caught there now stably remain within the safety limit for many species.

Despite extensive testing to ensure safety of Fukushima marine products, many dealers are still reluctant to buy the species.

Fish and shellfish from Fukushima Prefecture are being shipped to various parts of Japan, such as the Tohoku, Kanto, Chubu and Hokuriku regions. Prices of seafood items from Fukushima Prefecture are not much lower than those from other prefectures, according to Yoshiharu Nemoto, head of the fishing ground environment division with the Fukushima Prefectural Fisheries Experimental Station.

Yet few dealers are bidding for Fukushima marine products. If this trend continues with more Fukushima fish reaching the market, unsold leftovers from the prefecture could start to pile up and project a negative image, Nemoto said.

"It will become more necessary than ever to make publicity efforts, such as regularly releasing data concerning safety," he said.

Test fishing began in June 2012, 15 months after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami caused the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. Initially, only three species were covered: two kinds of octopuses and one type of shellfish.

While coverage has since expanded in stages, the latest addition of 10 species at one time is second only to the addition of 12 species, including brown sole and red sea bream, in August 2015.

Since April 2011, the Fukushima prefectural government has been monitoring the impact of radioactive fallout from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant on fish and shellfish. The radiation tests, which cover about 200 samples every week, have so far been conducted on 38,000 samples of 184 species.

The concentration of radioactive cesium initially exceeded the central government's safety limit of 100 becquerels per kilogram in most of the fish and shellfish surveyed. But the concentration has declined from year to year, and no sample has exceeded the safety limit since April 2015.

In more than 90 percent of the samples tested in July 2015 and later, radioactivity levels were below the detection limit.

Radioactivity levels in fish caught near the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant are also falling.

The central government's Japan Fisheries Research and Education Agency (FRA) on Aug. 25 released data on radioactivity levels in Japanese flounder caught in July in waters around the crippled nuclear plant.

The FRA said its high-precision tests, with a lower limit of detection set at a mere 1 becquerel per kg, found radioactivity levels of less than 10 becquerels per kg in all 41 individual organisms tested. More than 90 percent of them measured less than 5 becquerels per kg.

Catches from test fishing have continued to grow: 122 tons in 2012, 406 tons in 2013, 742 tons in 2014 and 1,512 tons in 2015.

But last year's catch was only 5.8 percent of the annual catch of 26,050 tons averaged over the decade preceding the 2011 disaster.

Fishermen are holding out high hopes for more fish species being eligible for catches.

Majority of children not returning to hometown schools

September 10, 2016

Only 28% of Fukushima children returning to former schools

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160910/p2a/00m/0na/001000c>

Only 28 percent of children are returning to their public elementary and junior high schools in five towns and villages in Fukushima Prefecture following the lifting of evacuation orders imposed after the 2011 nuclear disaster, the Mainichi Shimbun has learned. **The majority of schoolboys and girls are opting to stay out of their hometowns due to anxiety over radiation exposure and resettlement at evacuation sites.**

- **【Related】** Japan lifts evacuation orders in Fukushima affecting 10,000 people
- **【Related】** 70% of voluntary Fukushima evacuees undecided where to live after free housing ends

The trend raises concerns that the number of young people in these towns and villages will dwindle and the survival of the municipalities is at stake.

The five municipalities are **the towns of Hirono and Naraha and the villages of Iitate, Kawauchi and Katsurao**. They set up temporary elementary and junior high schools at evacuation sites after the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster triggered the multiple core meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. Hirono and Kawauchi reopened their public schools in 2012 and Naraha and Katsurao will follow suit in April 2017. Iitate plans to reopen its schools in April 2018, one year after the evacuation order is lifted.

Once these public schools have reopened, the temporary schools at evacuation sites are shut down, prompting children from the five affected municipalities to choose one of three options -- return to their

hometowns, commute to their former schools by school bus or other means, or attend schools at evacuation sites.

According to the Mainichi study, 55 percent of 259 pupils and students from Hirono and Kawauchi have returned to their former elementary and junior high schools because the evacuation orders were relatively short. But only 139 students or 15 percent of students from Naraha, Katsurao and Iitate responded to a survey in 2015-2016 that they would return to their original schools. Only three students, or 4 percent, of 74 students from Katsurao said they would return to their hometown schools.

As for students from Naraha, 17 percent of students replied that they would attend their hometown schools but half of them hoped to commute to their hometown schools from outside the town. If young evacuees in Iwaki, a major evacuation destination, try to commute by train and bus, a one-way trip takes one hour. An official of the Naraha board of education expressed concerns that these students are really serious about commuting to their hometowns. A Kawauchi village official says that **the returns of child-rearing generations are the village's lifeline**. These municipalities operate school buses to encourage the evacuees to return to their hometowns as a stopgap measure rather than as a permanent solution.

Yusuke Yamashita, an associate professor of urban and rural sociology at Tokyo Metropolitan University, says, "There are some parents who send their children to temporary schools before eventually returning to their hometowns. If these municipalities reopen their schools hastily, some families may abandon plans to return home (out of safety fears). **It is important for the communities to offer as many options as possible by keeping temporary schools.**"

Disaster victims not sufficiently protected by law

September 12, 2016

80% of disaster-hit municipalities want legal revision to meet needs: survey

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160912/p2a/00m/0na/013000c>

A large majority of municipalities that were hit by massive earthquakes and other disasters in recent years called for expanding the coverage of a law aimed at providing financial assistance for rebuilding damaged homes, a Mainichi Shimbun survey has learned.

- 【3.11 Disasters】
- 【Kumamoto Quake】

The survey, conducted on Sept. 11, covered 61 cities, towns and villages in six prefectures that suffered enormous damage from the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, the September 2015 Kanto-Tohoku floods and the April 2016 Kumamoto earthquakes. It found that 80 percent of those municipalities believe the Act on Support for Reconstructing Livelihoods of Disaster Victims should be revised, underscoring the fact that the law is not sufficiently catering to the needs of victims in disaster areas.

Under this law, up to 3 million yen each is provided to those whose homes were entirely destroyed in disasters, and those whose homes were partially damaged and require extensive repair work can also receive financial assistance. However, other partially damaged homes are not covered by the law. The most common answer among the disaster-hit municipalities was to update the law to provide aid to

households whose homes were partially destroyed but are not covered by the law. The second most common response was to raise the amount of relief money provided to affected households. The central government, however, is reluctant to review the support law.

Specifically, the survey covered 12 municipalities in Iwate Prefecture, 15 in Miyagi Prefecture, 10 in Fukushima Prefecture, five in Ibaraki Prefecture, four in Tochigi Prefecture and 15 in Kumamoto Prefecture. Of them, 57 municipalities responded except for four municipalities that suffered extensive damage from Typhoon Lionrock.

Forty-nine municipalities responding to the latest survey said the support law needs to be improved. Asked to choose from eight options for improvement, 24 municipalities said the financial assistance should be expanded to cover those whose homes were partially damaged; 17 municipalities said the amount of financial relief should be raised; and nine municipalities called for flexibility in recognizing damage to residences.

The Tochigi Prefecture city of Nikko called for expanding the law's coverage to partially damaged houses, with a municipal government official saying, "There are partially destroyed houses whose status is infinitely close to damage requiring major repair work, and it is difficult to win victims' understanding just by drawing such a simple line." An official with the Iwate Prefecture city of Rikuzentakata said, "There is an enormous gap between households whose homes were partially damaged (and are thus cast out of the law) and other households that benefited from the support law."

In areas damaged by the 2011 disaster, the most common request for the central government was to raise the amount of financial assistance provided to affected households. Behind the results are rising costs due to the reconstruction boom in disaster areas. "Construction costs are skyrocketing," said an official with the Iwate Prefecture town of Yamada. As some victims lost all their furniture and other assets to tsunami, the Miyagi Prefecture city of Higashimatsushima proposed raising the amount of aid for those whose homes were swept away by tsunami.

Seven municipalities raised questions about the way subsidies are provided on a household-by-household basis under the law and the definition of households -- though these were not among prearranged response options. "The amount of subsidies provided to each household is the same regardless of the number of members in a household. If the law takes the number of family members into account, we can provide assistance for their livelihood reconstruction in accordance with the realities they face," said an official with the Kumamoto Prefecture city of Yatsushiro.

In the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake, around 400,000 homes were either completely or partially destroyed, according to the National Police Agency. Of them, only about 193,000 households were eligible to receive financial aid under the support law to rebuild or repair their homes.

Meanwhile, the Cabinet Office provided a negative view toward legal revision when it was reached by the Mainichi, saying, "Because financial resources are limited, we'd like to respond to the matter by supporting self-help efforts, such as promoting subscriptions to private insurance."

Trying to dispel rumors about Fukushima food

September 21, 2016

'Farm inns' near Fukushima nuke plant see surge in guests

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160921/p2a/00m/0na/016000c>

NIHONMATSU, Fukushima -- The number of "farm inns" run by local residents here in the Towa district, dozens of kilometers from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, has steadily been increasing to accommodate a rising number of visitors and guests.

The farm inns are being run **to dispel groundless rumors about local farm products being tainted with radioactive substances** from the nuclear power station. Four farm inns opened in 2012, one year after the outbreak of the nuclear crisis, and there are currently 24 farm inns in the Towa district about 40 kilometers northwest of the nuclear complex. Two more farm inns are expected to open in the future. Guests of the inns can enjoy working on farms and cuisine using local ingredients so that they can feel assured of the safety of locally-produced products. The farm inns are gaining popularity and attracting **more than 1,000 guests a year**, as people visit and stay there to enjoy both lodging and local cuisine, **thinking that such activities will help disaster-stricken communities recover.**

The Towa district is a rural area **in the mountains**. The area's population has halved to about 6,500 over the last 50 years as it suffered from depopulation and the nuclear accident promoted local residents to stop farming.

The situation was such that local residents focused on farm inns. That's because demand for lodging facilities increased in the Towa district facing evacuation zones around the nuclear power plant as work to assess radiation levels and other radiation-related projects began in the evacuation districts. A non-profit organization comprised of local residents played a coordinating role and recruited farmers to run inns there. Most of the people who initially used the farm inns were researchers and administrative officers. But currently, many college students and company employees use them for training. A total of 1,106 people stayed at the inns in 2015.

On the evening of Sept. 8, about two dozen students of Tokyo-based Daito Bunka University stayed at six farm inns there for a seminar camp. The inns served their specialty dishes in an effort **to show the students that local farm products have been shipped after clearing radiation checks.**

The "Tanbo" farm inn run by Masatoshi Muto, a 65-year-old vegetable farmer, served home-made meals using special vegetables such as cucumbers and carrots. Male students said they liked the food because the vegetables were so fresh. Muto said he had felt depressed at times when he was told by some people that "we don't want to eat food from Fukushima." But he said, "I feel uplifted when I see our guests enjoy eating." Hironao Takahashi, a 19-year-old sophomore who stayed at the inn, said, "I've come to know that they check their products carefully before shipping them. From now on, I would like to see the foodstuff with my own eyes and judge without being influenced by rumors."

Tatsuhiro Ono, a 62-year-old vegetable farmer and a key figure in the group of farm inn operators, said, "Even if we show scientific data, we cannot easily persuade people about the safety of our products unless they come and visit production sites." The value of total vegetable shipments from the entire Towa district remains about 80 percent of pre-disaster levels, he said. "We hope that people who visit our farm inns will send a message about the attractiveness of the Towa district."

Fukushima food fair held in India to dispel rumors

September 25, 2016

Fukushima food fair held in India

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160925_01/

An event featuring food from Japan's disaster-hit Fukushima Prefecture has taken place in the Indian capital, New Delhi. **The organizers hope to dispel unfounded rumors about the safety of the foodstuffs.**

A group of Japanese expatriates from Fukushima organized the event held on Saturday at a Japanese school in the city.

Rumors about the safety of food from Fukushima persist from the nuclear accident in 2011 that followed a massive earthquake and tsunami. Tests found the products harmless.

Items on sale at the event included rice balls, made of rice grown in Fukushima and cooked in water from the prefecture.

Traditional potato stew and juice made from locally-produced peaches were also on offer.

Visitors formed long lines to purchase freshly-made rice balls and munched them on the spot.

An Indian man who was in Japan at the time of the disaster said he knew the food from Fukushima was called into question in the wake of the nuclear accident. He added he is convinced of its safety.

Proceeds from the event will be donated to areas in Japan's Kumamoto Prefecture and the vicinity, which were ravaged by powerful quakes in April this year.

A representative of the organizers said they will never forget the support extended to Fukushima from across Japan and are eager to help people in Kumamoto and neighboring Oita rebuild their lives.

Fukushima dams "storage facilities" for accumulating cesium

September 26, 2016

Anxiety soars as cesium builds up in Fukushima dams

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160926/p2a/00m/0na/011000c>



Ogaki Dam in Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, as seen from a Mainichi Shimbun helicopter in July 2016, contains high concentrations of radioactive cesium exceeding the limit set for designated waste. (Mainichi)

Dams surrounding the stricken Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) have become **de facto storage facilities for high concentrations of radioactive cesium as the element continues to accumulate.**

- **【Related】** High levels of radioactive cesium pooling at dams near Fukushima nuke plant
- **【Fukushima & Nuclear Power】**

With no effective countermeasures in sight, the government insists that water from the dams is safe, but to local residents, the government's stance comes across as the shelving of a crucial problem.

"It's best to leave it as it is," an official from the Ministry of the Environment says, with the knowledge that in 10 dams in Fukushima Prefecture, there is soil containing concentrations of cesium over the limit set for designated waste -- or over 8,000 becquerels per kilogram.

According to monitoring procedures carried out by the ministry, the levels of radioactive cesium detected in the dams' waters, at 1 to 2 becquerels per liter, are well below the maximum amount permitted in drinking water, which is 10 becquerels per liter. The air radiation doses in the dams' surrounding areas are at a maximum 2 microsieverts per hour, which the ministry says "does not immediately affect humans, if they avoid going near the dams." This information is the main basis behind the central government's wait-and-see stance. For the time being, the cesium appears to have attached itself to soil and is collected at the bottom of the dams, with the water above it blocking radiation from reaching and affecting the surrounding areas.

In a basic policy based on a special law, passed in August 2011, on measures for dealing with radioactive material following the onset of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, the Environment Ministry stipulates the decontamination of areas necessary from "the standpoint of protecting human health." The ministry argues that as long as high concentrations of cesium at the bottom of multiple dams in Fukushima Prefecture do not pose imminent danger to human health, there are no legal problems in the ministry refraining from taking action.

"If the dams dry up due to water shortages, we just have to keep people from getting close to them," the aforementioned ministry official says. "If we were to try to decontaminate the dams, how would we secure water sources while the work is in progress? The impact of trying to decontaminate the dams under the current state of affairs would be greater than not doing anything."

This stance taken by the central government has drawn protests from local residents.

"The Environment Ministry only says that it will monitor the dams' water and the surrounding areas. They say, 'We'll deal with anything that comes up,' but when asked what they plan to do if the dams break, they have no answers. It's painful to us that we can only give town residents the answers that the Environment Ministry gives us," says an official with the revitalization division of the Namie Municipal Government. The central government is set to lift evacuation orders for a part of the Fukushima Prefecture town of Namie in spring of 2017.

According to a Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries survey, Ogaki Dam, an agricultural dam in Namie, was estimated to have sediment totaling approximately 8 trillion becquerels of cesium as of December 2013. **The agriculture ministry plans to re-survey the dam's accumulated cesium amounts and water safety before the water is used for agricultural purposes.** Agricultural and fishery products from Fukushima Prefecture are tested to ensure that radioactive substances that they contain are below the maximum permissible amounts stipulated by law before they are shipped for distribution.

Still, one town official worries how revelations of high levels of radioactive material in local dams will affect consumers. **"No matter how much they are told that the water is safe, will consumers buy agricultural products from Namie, knowing that there is cesium at the bottom of local dams?"**

A 57-year-old vegetable farmer from Namie who has been evacuated to the Fukushima Prefecture city of Iwaki says, "The central government keeps on emphasizing that the dams are safe, but doesn't seem to be considering any fundamental solutions to the problem. If this state of affairs persists, we won't be able to return to Namie with peace of mind, nor will it be easy to resume farming."

Only Fukushima apples

October 16, 2016

Fukushima apples to be used during World Cocktail Championships in bid to repair tarnished reputation

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/10/16/national/fukushima-apples-used-world-cocktail-championships-bid-repair-tarnished-reputation/#.WANU18Ideos>

Fukushima Minpo

More than five years after the Fukushima nuclear disaster, efforts by local farmers to regain consumer trust in their produce are finally paying off, with apples grown in the city of Fukushima chosen to be used in the annual World Cocktail Championships, which kicks off on Tuesday in Tokyo.

During the contest, which will run through Thursday at the Imperial Hotel, Fukushima-grown apples will be used in the fruit-cutting event scheduled for Wednesday. **Several varieties of fruit will be used in the competition, but for apples, only those from Fukushima will be used.**

The planned appearance of apples from the disaster-hit prefecture is due to a joint effort by the Fukushima Fruit Thanks Project, a group of fruit farmers from the northern region of the prefecture and Yoshikazu Suda, a bartender in Tokyo's Ginza district who also hails from the prefecture. Suda, who runs the Ginza Zenith bar, is from the city of Date. Since the triple-meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, Suda has been working in cooperation with the farmers group to promote produce from the area.

As an executive director of the Nippon Bartenders Association and a director of a Ginza bar association, Suda saw the upcoming world championships as a great way to help promote fruit from the prefecture, which have experienced poor sales due to ongoing fears over radiation contamination.

Knowing the superior quality of Fukushima-grown fruit, Suda pitched the use of apples grown in the city of Fukushima for the competition.

"I'd be happy if using apples this time would be one way to help the reconstruction of my hometown," Suda said.

During the competition, apples grown by Chusaku Anzai, who operates a fruit farm in the city of Fukushima, will be used.

"I want to convey the greatness of Fukushima fruit to bartenders from around the world," said Anzai, 67, who is also vice chair of the farmers group.

To prepare for shipping, Anzai meticulously checked the condition of each apple at his farm earlier this month.

Some 500 bartenders from 53 countries will gather in Tokyo to take part in the championships, which will be held in Japan for the first time in 20 years.

Fukushima Mayor Kaoru Kobayashi has high hopes for the event and sees it as a chance to tout Fukushima as one of the nation's top fruit producers.

"It'll be a great opportunity to show the charm of Fukushima," Kobayashi said.

This section, appearing every third Monday, focuses on topics and issues covered by the Fukushima Minpo, the largest newspaper in Fukushima Prefecture. The original article was published on Oct. 5.

Tsuruha settles with TEPCO

October 21, 2016

Tsuruha settles damages suit with Tepco over Fukushima disaster

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/10/21/national/crime-legal/tsuruha-settles-damages-suit-tepco-fukushima-disaster/#.WAolPsldeos>

JJIJ

SAPPORO – Sapporo-based drug store chain Tsuruha Co. on Friday agreed with Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc. to settle a damages suit related to the 2011 nuclear accident at the utility's Fukushima No. 1 plant.

In the suit, Tsuruha, a unit of Tsuruha Holdings Inc., sought damages totaling ¥1.25 billion, claiming that the nuclear accident forced the company was forced to scrap five drug store outlets within 20 km of the crippled plant after initially halting their operations until February 2012.

Under the settlement, reached at Sapporo High Court, Tepco agreed to pay ¥280 million to Tsuruha, according to a lawyer on the Tsuruha side.

In March this year, Sapporo District Court ordered Tepco to pay some ¥200 million to Tsuruha. Both sides appealed against the ruling.

New agreement on farmin with Tohoku University

Tohoku Univ., Fukushima village ink pact to rev up farming

<http://www.fukushimaminponews.com/news.html?id=742>

22 October 2016

Tohoku University's Graduate School of Agricultural Science and the village of Katsurao in Fukushima Prefecture concluded on Oct. 21 a partnership agreement for restoration from the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake. It is the first such accord signed by the school with a prefectural municipality. The agreement calls for technological development, including the use of information and communications technology in agricultural machinery, to help revitalization of the local farming and livestock sector battered by the disaster.

Under the agreement, the school will embark on research and testing using farmland in the village on such themes as growing rice plants organically and promoting recycle-oriented livestock agriculture in which biomass energy is produced from cattle feces for electric power generation. The project will seek to reduce the workload on farmers in organic agriculture by developing equipment such as sensors capable of monitoring farmland conditions through remote control and machines that automatically eradicate weeds.

A signing ceremony was held on the day at the village office, with Katsurao Mayor Masahide Matsumoto and the graduate school's Dean Michio Komai exchanging documents. Matsumoto expressed hope that the outcome of research and development "will motivate farmers to undertake agriculture." Komai said the school expects the project to "contribute to revitalizing the disaster-affected area through the development of agricultural technology and others."

Meanwhile, the graduate school set up the same day a branch office in the village of its Tohoku Agricultural Science Center for Reconstruction. The office, located at the village's revitalization center, will be used for professors and students to undertake research in Katsurao.

(Translated by Kyodo News)

"Temporary" storage sites yet another concern for residents

October 21, 2016

Study: Possible water problem at storage sites in Fukushima

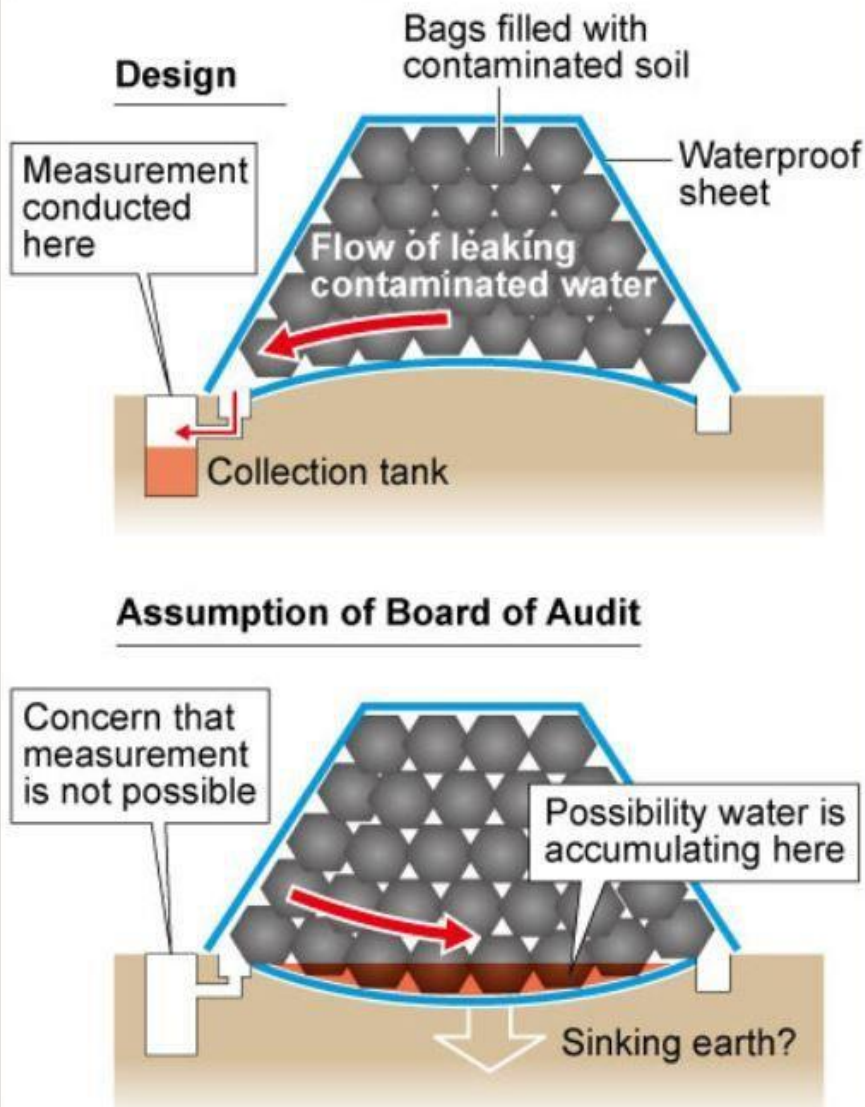
<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201610210044.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN



It might be difficult to measure radiation levels in water at this temporary storage site for contaminated soil in Fukushima Prefecture. (Kenji Izawa)

Basic structure of temporary storage site for contaminated soil



Bags of radiation-contaminated soil could be sinking into the ground at temporary storage sites in Fukushima Prefecture, allowing water to accumulate within instead of flowing to outside tanks for testing, the Board of Audit said.

No confirmation has been made that the ground at the sites is actually sinking or if contaminated water has pooled inside. But Board of Audit officials are asking the Environment Ministry to consider additional safety measures if signs indicate that this is actually occurring.

The board's study focused on 34 of the 106 temporary storage sites that the Environment Ministry set up for soil removed through decontamination work after the disaster in March 2011 unfolded at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Construction of the storage sites started in 2012, and the transfer of contaminated soil to these facilities was completed in 2015.

The temporary storage sites were designed to have a slight mound on the ground in the center to allow water from the bags to flow down into surrounding collection tanks for periodic measurements of radiation levels.

Internal Environment Ministry guidelines called for this setup at storage sites containing bags that are not waterproof.

The Board of Audit studied 34 temporary storage sites where the bags are not waterproof. These bags were piled five deep or higher at those sites.

The study showed that at 31 of the sites, the weight of the bags may have not only flattened the mound in the center, but it also could have created an indent in the ground where the leaking water could accumulate.

If the water does not flow to the tanks, it will be difficult to determine the radiation levels.

The study also noted that the foundations at the sites were soft to begin with and may be unable to support the bags of soil. The sinking phenomenon could worsen as time passes.

The Environment Ministry played down the risk of the water contaminating areas around the storage facilities.

“Even if the ground has sunk, the structure is designed so water does not leak outside the site,” a ministry official said. “Eventually, the water should collect in the tanks. We will make every effort to oversee the sites as well as use waterproof bags as much as possible.”

A total of 4.16 billion yen (\$40 million) was spent to construct the 31 temporary storage sites.

The Environment Ministry designed the temporary storage sites under the precondition they would be used for only three years and then removed. For that reason, measures were not taken to strengthen the foundations to prevent the ground from sinking, even if soft farmland was chosen for a site.

The plan is to eventually return the land where the temporary storage sites have been built to its original state and return it to the landowners

However, the Board of Audit’s study adds another concern for residents, many of whom had opposed construction of the temporary storage sites in their neighborhoods.

Toshio Sato, 68, has evacuated to Fukushima city from his home in Iitate village, where four of the possible problem storage sites are located.

“There are some people who want to resume growing rice once they return home,” Sato said. “If water is accumulating, there is the possibility it could unexpectedly overflow into surrounding areas. The concerns just seem to emerge one after another.”

The government plans to lift the evacuation order for a large part of Iitate in March 2017.

(This article was compiled from reports by Kosuke Tauchi, Shoko Rikimaru, Kenji Izawa and Akifumi Nagahashi.)

Promoting tourism and local foods in Fukushima

October 21, 2016

Fukushima officials luring tourists from Australia

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161021_34/

Government and businesspeople from Japan's Fukushima Prefecture are in Australia to **promote tourism and specialty foods from the region.**

About 60 people attended a tourism seminar in Sydney on Friday. The event is the first of its kind to be held by Fukushima in Australia.

Officials of the prefecture's government and businesses introduced world-class skiing sites and other Fukushima attractions that are popular with overseas visitors.

Participants had a chance to try local specialties including sake and ramen.

One participant said he didn't know Fukushima was such a great place to visit, and expressed hope to go there.

Tourism officials say the number of foreign visitors has not returned to levels before the 2011 earthquake and nuclear crisis.

But Fukushima is becoming a popular destination for Australians. Last year about 1,500 visited -- nearly 4 times the pre-disaster level.

Propaganda sign moved to Fukushima museum

October 28, 2016

Fukushima museum receives pro-nuclear signs for safekeeping

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201610280063.html>

By MASAKAZU HONDA/ Staff Writer



Workers in protective gear remove the banner lauding nuclear energy in Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture in December. (Yosuke Fukudome)

AIZUWAKAMATSU, Fukushima Prefecture—Pro-nuclear propaganda signs that became the ironic symbol of a town evacuated in the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster have been moved to a museum's storage ahead of their possible public display as a warning from history.

The Fukushima Museum in this city took over care of the signs this month on behalf of the town government of Futaba, which co-hosts the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The most well-known of the banners, which residents campaigned to save, reads: "Genshiryoku--Akarui Mirai no Energy" (Nuclear power is the energy of a bright future).

Yuji Onuma, a 40-year-old former resident of Futaba who now lives in Kogawa, Ibaraki Prefecture, came up with the slogan as a sixth grader at a Futaba school. The town hall adopted it to promote nuclear energy.

Onuma, who fled the town amid the triple meltdown, said the move to the museum is welcome in terms of keeping them in good condition.

"But I am hoping that they will be shown to the public as soon as possible," he said.

The signboards were removed between December and March along with other panels of slogans promoting nuclear energy in the town. The town government cited the danger of the tall steel structures collapsing because of old age.

They had been kept in a barn wrapped in blankets until the prefectural museum came forward with the offer of storage space early this month.

"The signboards will be kept from deteriorating at the museum where the temperature and humidity can be easily adjusted," a Futaba official said of the transfer to the museum.

The town hall had initially sought to remove and dispose of the prominent signs, saying they were nearly 25 years old and may fall off at any time.

But after the town announced the decision to do so in March 2015, Onuma and other like-minded people scrambled to start a petition to call for their preservation as historically important items.

"The signs should be stored and exhibited as a 'negative legacy'," said Onuma, who recalled that he had once been proud of co-hosting a nuclear power station as he believed it would lead the town to a promising future.

But after the disaster, he decided he was wrong and switched to the solar power generation business in Kogawa.

In the end, the town government agreed to preserve them after they were removed from the original site. A Futaba official said the signs could be featured at a facility to pass down the records of and lessons learned from the powerful quake, tsunami and the nuclear disaster which the prefectural government is planning to construct.

Café Amazon opens 20 km from plant

November 2, 2016

Thai cafe chain sets up shop in village near Fukushima plant

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201611020071.html>

By SUSUMU OKAMOTO/ Staff Writer

KAWAUCHI, Fukushima Prefecture--A Thai-based cafe franchise operator has opened the first coffee shop in this village since reactors melted down at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant about 20 kilometers away in 2011.

Cafe Amazon entered the Japanese market in an unlikely location, but its Nov. 1 opening provided much-needed joy for residents of disaster-hit Kawauchi and the neighboring Miyakoji district in Tamura.

"I was longing for the opening because I love coffee so much that I drink five cups a day," said Miho Ide, 59, who visited the place with her 65-year-old husband, Shigekatsu, and ordered a cup of coffee priced at 280 yen (\$2.70).

The mountainous village of Kawauchi has abundant nature but few dining establishments. A cafe had operated in the village before the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, but it closed down after quake-triggered landslides hit the area and residents were ordered to evacuate when nuclear disaster unfolded.

The cafe was opened by Codomo Energy Co., an Osaka-based construction material manufacturer that set up a factory in Kawauchi in 2014 to help revive the local economy. The company signed the franchise contract with PTT Public Co., a state-owned oil and gas company that operates the Cafe Amazon chain in Thailand.

Tens of millions of yen were spent to renovate an old-style Japanese house into the 60-seat cafe with a deck.

Kawauchi Mayor Yuko Endo, who visited the cafe just after it opened at 10 a.m., marveled: "Villagers can gather and have good time here."

Yasunori Iwamoto, 54, president of Codomo Energy, was busy trying to ensure everything went smoothly on opening day. But he took the time to talk to the customers.

Shigekatsu told Iwamoto that it would be great if the new cafe offered light meals, given the dearth of restaurants in the village.

The company president paused and replied, "We are thinking of offering alcohol drinks at night in the future, too."

A delighted Shigekatsu said, "I am so happy."

Should victims have to depend on charity?

Das Geschäft mit dem Krebs

Ein Meinungsartikel von Dr. Alex Rosen

<https://www.ippnw.de/atomenergie/gesundheit/artikel/de/das-geschaeft-mit-dem-krebs.html>

11.10.2016

Der Umgang mit Betroffenen einer Katastrophe sagt viel mehr über eine Gesellschaft aus als statistische Daten wie Bruttosozialprodukt oder Wirtschaftswachstum. Seit 2011 werden die Schilddrüsen aller Bewohnern der Präfektur Fukushima, die zum Zeitpunkt des Super-GAU von Fukushima unter 18 Jahre alt waren, regelmäßig auf Krebs- und Krebsvorstufen untersucht. Während die Kosten für Kinder unter 18 Jahren von der Regierung generell gedeckt werden, müssen die Familien diese zunächst für einige Zeit vorstrecken und bekommen sie erst mit einer Verzögerung zurück erstattet. Zudem wird im japanischen Gesundheitswesen generell verlangt, dass ab dem 18. Lebensjahr 30% aller medizinischen Behandlungskosten von den Patienten selbst getragen werden.

Dies gilt pikanterweise auch für die Schilddrüsenuntersuchungen bei Menschen, die radioaktivem Niederschlag ausgesetzt wurden, sowie für eventuell notwendige Biopsien, Operationen oder Langzeittherapien. Für eine Schilddrüsenuntersuchung fallen für die Betroffenen somit Kosten von ca. 10.000 Yen (ca. 87 Euro) an, für eine Operation zwischen 150.000 und 300.000 Yen (zwischen 1.300 und 2.600 Euro). Für viele der betroffenen Familien, die durch Evakuierung und den Verlust ihrer Heimat und Arbeit ohnehin schwer getroffen sind, sind diese Kosten nicht tragbar und verschärfen die soziale Abwärtsspirale von Verschuldung und Verarmung, in der sich viele von ihnen bereits befinden. Angesichts der Tatsache, dass im Zuge der Atomkatastrophe von 2011 von Seiten der Behörden bewusst auf die Ausgabe von Jodtabletten verzichtet wurde und Millionen von Menschen somit radioaktivem Jod ausgesetzt wurden, hat die Präfektur Fukushima letztes Jahr begonnen, auch den mittlerweile über 18 Jahre alten Patienten die Kosten für die Schilddrüsenuntersuchungen zu erstatten. Allerdings dauern auch diese Erstattungen Zeit und die Familien müssen die Kosten zunächst vorstrecken. Zudem sind Erstattungen nur möglich, wenn die Patienten sich in den offiziellen Einrichtungen der Fukushima Medical University untersuchen lassen. Jegliche Form von Zweitmeinung außerhalb des staatlich kontrollierten Systems würde so zu finanziellen Mehrbelastungen führt. Auch werden Begleitkosten, wie der Transport zu den Untersuchungen oder Kompensationen von Lohnausfällen der Eltern nicht berücksichtigt.

Da diese Kosten und die komplexen Erstattungsverfahren viele Familien weiterhin vor große finanzielle Probleme stellt, hat sich nun zusätzlich eine karitative Nicht-Regierungs-Organisation gegründet. Der „3/11 Children's Fund for Thyroid Cancer“ will hilfsbedürftigen Familien in Fukushima bei den Kosten der Untersuchungen und Behandlungen selbst, wie auch bei eventuell anfallenden Begleitkosten unterstützen. Spenden aus der Bevölkerung sollen ab sofort entgegen genommen werden und man hofft, mehrere hundert Betroffene mit Beträgen ab 50.000 Yen (ca. 430 Euro) unterstützen zu können.

Der Umgang mit Betroffenen einer Katastrophe sagt viel mehr über eine Gesellschaft aus als statistische Daten wie Bruttosozialprodukt oder Wirtschaftswachstum. Der Untersuchungsausschuss des japanischen Parlaments kam nach dem Super-GAU von Fukushima zu dem Schluss, dass die Atomkatastrophe „menschengemacht“ war – und dass die Atomindustrie, die Aufsichtsbehörden und die Politik, die allesamt die Gefahren der Atomenergie und der grassierenden Korruption in der japanischen

Atomwirtschaft jahrzehntelang ignoriert haben, eine bedeutende Mitschuld tragen. Angesichts des institutionellen Versagens der zuständigen Behörden und der anhaltenden Verschleierung des wahren Ausmaßes der Atomkatastrophe ist es besonders bitter, dass die vom radioaktiven Niederschlag betroffenen Familien, deren Angehörige ein signifikant erhöhtes Erkrankungsrisiko davotrugen, nun auch mit den finanziellen Lasten dieser Erkrankungen allein gelassen werden.

Es kann nicht sein, dass in einem der reichsten Länder, mit einem der fortschrittlichsten Gesundheitswesen der Welt, Menschen die durch staatliches Versagen zu Schaden gekommen sind, von barmherzigen Spenden und dem Engagement einiger Freiwilliger abhängig gemacht werden. Eine vernünftige Aufarbeitung der ökologischen, gesundheitlichen, psychologischen, sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Folgen der Atomkatastrophe ist in Japan dringend notwendig, wie auch eine Kehrtwende im Umgang mit denjenigen, die von der Atomkatastrophe und der freigewordenen Radioaktivität betroffen wurden und weiterhin in Gegenden mit erhöhten Strahlenwerten leben müssen.

see also : <http://www.fukushima-is-still-news.com/2016/09/3-11-children-s-fund-for-thyroid-cancer.html>

Restoring paintings for litate shrine



November 8, 2016

Gutted Fukushima shrine's famed wolf paintings reproduced

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/11/08/national/gutted-fukushima-shrines-famed-wolf-paintings-reproduced/#.WCGuMsmDmos>

Kyodo

FUKUSHIMA – The famed wolf paintings on the ceiling of the gutted Yamatsumi Shrine in the village of Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture, have been reproduced by Tokyo university art students and their teacher. The village remains off-limits due to radiation contamination following the March 2011 reactor core meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power Co. Holdings Inc.'s Fukushima No. 1 plant. **But locals hope the restored paintings from the shrine, which burned down in a 2013 fire, will give people a chance to visit the village once the evacuation order is lifted in March.**

Yamatsumi Shrine is known for its faith in wolves. About 240 paintings of wolves in different positions were completed at its hall of worship in about 1904. But the hall and the paintings were burned up in the fire that broke out in April 2013.

Kei Arai, associate professor at Tokyo University of the Arts, and his students undertook the restoration of the shrine's art, referring to pictures of the paintings taken before the fire. The hall itself was reconstructed in June 2015.

Now the shrine is refitted with wolf art on the ceilings. One wolf is seen sleeping in the bush, while another gazes at a blue waterfall.

"I hope the paintings of these happy wolves will lift the feelings of viewers," said Keisuke Kato, a staffer at the shrine. "I hope the art will give more people a chance to visit the village, and help with its reconstruction."

Iitate, one of the municipalities most severely affected by the 2011 radiation disaster, will have evacuation orders lifted in most areas at the end of next March, including where the shrine is located.

Human Rights Now on Fukushima (August 2016)

August 30, 2016

"Fukushima: Human Rights Situation of people Affected by the Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Station Accident"/ Written Statement submitted to 33rd Human Rights Council session

<http://hrn.or.jp/eng/news/2016/08/30/fukushima-human-rights-situation-of-people-affected-by-the-fukushima-dai-ichi-nuclear-power-station-accident-written-statement-submitted-to-33rd-human-rights-council-session/>

Human Rights Now has submitted a written statement **"Fukushima: Human Rights Situation of People Affected by the Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Station Accident"** to the 33rd session of Human Rights Council, which is going to be held in Geneva from September 13, 2016.

HRN written statement on Fukushima for 33rd HRC [PDF]

We will deliver an oral statement in the HRC session in Geneva as well.

Fukushima: Human Rights Situation of People Affected by the Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Station Accident

The 2011 accident at the Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Station released an estimated 168 times more radiation than the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima over large regions of northwest Japan, and it continues to pose serious risks to the environment and residents' life and health.

Human Rights Now (HRN), a Tokyo-based international human rights NGO, continues to observe risks to people affected by the accident and insufficiencies by the Japanese government to protect their rights to life and health, particularly those most vulnerable to radiation and the displacement situation, such as infants, pregnant women, and the elderly.

1. The Current Situation of Affected People

As of 14 July 2016, approximately 148,000 evacuees from Fukushima Prefecture remain displaced, with about 47,850 living in nearby temporary housing, and the rest in other areas of Japan.[1]

Evacuation was organized by the Japanese government in 2012 into three areas, where the annual radiation dose at the time was roughly (1) less than 20mSv/year, (2) 20-50mSv/year, and (3) 50mSv/year or areas not expected to drop below 20mSv/year before March 2016.[2] The government has gradually been lifting evacuation orders in Areas 1 and 2, saying it will lift all of them by March 2017.[3] TEPCO compensation payments, which cover evacuation expenses and pain and suffering of evacuees, are set to end by March 2018.[4]

These steps pressure evacuees to return to areas with exposures potentially up to 20mSv/year, much higher than the ICRP's 1mSV/year, recommended limit for public radiation exposure.[5]

For persons evacuated from non-designated areas, TEPCO has not provided substantial support or compensation, and government support has been limited to free housing, ending in March 2018.[6] 70% of respondents to an evacuee survey living in temporary housing under Fukushima's free housing program stated that they have not been able to decide where they will live when the program ends.[7] Especially for persons evacuated to Tokyo, their greatest concern is their housing situation, primarily that their housing assistance period is too short, followed by insufficient living expenses and not knowing their future.[8]

There have also been increasing numbers of suicide in Fukushima due to their anxious situations.[9] In interviews, evacuees say they are pressured to return to their home areas after evacuation orders are lifted. The government has failed to have effective consultation with the affected citizens who have voiced their opposition to the government decision.[10] When evacuees are interviewed about why they do not want to return, they cite fears of health risks by radiation.[11]

Decontamination has not been completed in many areas, and more than six million bags of contaminated soil and waste remain stored in temporary storage sites which can be near residential areas or simply along the roadside, concentrating radiation exposure.[12]

2. Right to Health & Insufficient Medical Care

The government has not established free, periodic, and comprehensive health checks related to radiation for affected people, despite the need for consideration of health issues.

The only substantive health check conducted by prefectural governments is thyroid ultrasound examinations every two years; however, it is limited to children under age of 18 who live or used to live in Fukushima prefecture.[13] Adults and residents outside Fukushima prefecture are excluded.

As of March 2016, 172 children in Fukushima prefecture were diagnosed with or believed to have thyroid cancer. [14][15] [16]

It is very serious that 57 children are newly diagnosed with or believed to have thyroid cancer in the second survey conducted in 2014 and 2015.

However, prefecture government has not yet acknowledged the negative health impact of radiation for children residing affected area. There is no move to expand the scope of health care and survey for the people living in contaminated area.

3. Failure to Implement UN Recommendations

The Special Rapporteur on the right to health, Anand Grover, issued a report at the 23rd Human Rights Council in May 2013 with recommendations to the Japanese government which have not been implemented.[17] These include:

- Formulate a national plan on evacuation zones and dose limits of radiation by using current scientific evidence, based on human rights rather than on a risk-benefit analysis, and reduce the radiation dose to less than 1mSv/year.
- Recommended evacuees to return only when the radiation dose has been reduced as far as possible and to levels below 1mSv/year.
- Before return, the Government should continue providing financial support and subsidies to all evacuees so that they can make a voluntary decision to return to their homes or remain evacuated.
- Continue monitoring the impact of radiation on the health of affected persons through holistic and comprehensive screening and health surveys for a considerable length of time.
- Health surveys should be provided to persons residing in all affected areas with radiation exposure higher than 1mSv/year.

In 2014 the UN Human Rights Committee also recommended that the Japanese government “lift the designation of contaminated locations as evacuation areas only where the radiation level does not place the residents at risk.”[18] Nevertheless, the Japanese government has continually failed to implement these recommendations while implementing policies that are adverse to them.

4. Recommendations

HRN is gravely concerned over the persistent failure of the Japanese government to protect the rights of affected people.

It urges the Japanese government to reform all relevant policies based on UN recommendations and a victims-based and rights-based approach, including to:

- 1) Revise the decision to lift evacuation designations for areas above 1mSv/year;
- 2) Revise the decision to cease housing support for evacuees from non-designated areas;
- 3) Protect all affected evacuees as IDPs and provide all necessary financial and material support to ensure their rights to housing, health, environment, and family;
- 4) Formulate a national plan on evacuation zones and dose limits of radiation to protect the most vulnerable people and reduce the radiation dose to less than 1mSv/year;
- 5) Provide funding for relocation, housing, employment, education, and other essential support needed by those who chose to evacuate, stay, or return to any area where radiation exceeds 1mSv/year;

- 6) Reform health monitoring policy and conduct comprehensive and long-term health check-ups for affected people living in areas with radiation doses exceeding 1mSv/year;
- 7) Ensure effective consultation with affected people.

HRN requests the Human Rights Council to continuously monitor the human rights situation of people affected by the nuclear disaster and the implementation status of relevant UN recommendations. HRN further requests the UN special rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes, Mr. Baskut Tuncak, to conduct an official visit to Japan and make an effort to prevent further violations among affected people.

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- [12] Ministry of Environment Japan, "Progress on Off-site Cleanup and Interim Storage in Japan", July 2016, at 14, 23, http://josen.env.go.jp/en/pdf/progressseet_progress_on_cleanup_efforts.pdf.
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Tormented "germ" from Fukushima

November 10, 2016

Fukushima evacuee student bullied as school failed to act

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201611100047.html>

By KOJI OMORI/ Staff Writer

YOKOHAMA--A junior high school student evacuated from Fukushima Prefecture after the 2011 nuclear disaster is refusing to attend classes due to years of bullying.

At an elementary school, the boy was given a cruel nickname with “germ” added to his name. His tormentors demanded he pay them money from government compensation for disaster victims.

His elementary school failed to take action in the case, which was “tantamount to abandoning the duty of education,” according to a damning report Nov. 9 by an investigative committee of the city's board of education.

“It's really disappointing,” said Yokohama Mayor Fumiko Hayashi at a news conference the same day. “Not everybody fully understands what people in the disaster-hit areas went through. It is our job to keep educating them by all means possible.”

The boy entered a public elementary school here, south of Tokyo, in August 2011, five months after the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The disaster prompted his parents to flee Fukushima Prefecture.

The boy was a second-grader at the time and the bullying started soon after his arrival at the school.

When he was a fifth grader, a group of 10 or so bullies forced him to pay 50,000 yen (\$480) to 100,000 yen on around 10 occasions. They apparently spent the money in game arcades and for other purposes.

“You are receiving compensation (for the nuclear accident),” one bully was quoted as saying, referring to financial efforts to alleviate the plight of evacuees from Fukushima Prefecture. The boy stole the cash from his parents to meet their demands.

He began refusing to go to the school on occasion, and now, as a student in a public junior high school, has stopped going to school ever.

In May 2014, his parents complained to the elementary school that the bullying was escalating.

The school held two meetings of an investigative committee into school bullying but concluded the situation was not sufficiently “serious” in terms of the antibullying law.

The school said the investigation was abandoned, citing a “lack of communication with the boy's guardians.”

The parents asked the city's board of education in December 2015 to do its own investigation.

The school then finally admitted a “serious situation” existed and the board's third-party investigative committee started its own probe.

Disaster drill at Ikata plant

November 11, 2016

Disaster drill underway for Ikata nuclear plant

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161111_19/

A major anti-disaster drill is being held on Friday at a nuclear plant in western Japan. The exercise is based on the scenario of a powerful earthquake striking the region.

About 23,000 people are taking part in the annual drill at the Ikata plant in Ehime Prefecture. It's the first such exercise since the No.3 reactor was reactivated in August.

Local residents joined officials from 90 organizations, including central and local governments and the operator, Shikoku Electric Power Company.

Plant workers gathered at an emergency control center to deal with the situation.

Officials used the lessons learned from the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi plant accident and built the center on higher ground to protect it from tsunami.

An exercise to evacuate residents by boat was held for the first time at Cape Sada. The plant is located at the base of the cape. A major quake could disrupt road traffic, blocking evacuation by land routes.

Ehime prefectural officials are reviewing their evacuation plans after a series of quakes hit Kumamoto Prefecture in April.

The many challenges they face include finding temporary accommodation for isolated residents in an emergency. Only 10 facilities are protected against radiation.

The officials say they hope the drill will help them to test the effectiveness of their evacuation plans.

Luxury hotel in Fukushima



November 12, 2016

A new luxury hotel — in Fukushima?

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2016/11/12/travel/new-luxury-hotel-fukushima/#.WCgaoMmDmot>

by Robert Michael Poole

Special To The Japan Times

On March 11, 2011, the residents of Fukushima Prefecture felt the earth shake as a massive quake struck off the northeastern coast of Japan. But few could have predicted the explosions that would later follow or that the reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant would go in to meltdown. The region has been physically changed, tainted by radiation, but also altered in other ways: The government's investigation and ensuing media attention has ensured the words "Fukushima" and "radiation" are forever linked.

One of the most unique disaster images from Fukushima though, is not a photograph of earthquake-cracked villages or exploding reactor buildings. It is an ukiyo-e print by Meiji Era (1868-1912) artist Tankei Inoue. The print depicts the 1888 eruption of Mount Bandai in Yama-Gun, Fukushima, which wiped out villages and transformed the region's farmland. It was the first major natural disaster that the forward-thinking Meiji Era government faced.

The damage to Fukushima's reputation from that catastrophe eventually faded. In fact, the disaster created a new, rich landscape, one that forms part of the present Bandai-Asahi National Park. The region is home to a rather unique hotel that is actively seeking to allay fears that Fukushima is once again a dodgy destination for tourists.

"We want to provide facts about what is happening in this region," says Takeshi Munakata, owner of Hotelli Aalto, which provides radiation readings on its website that are taken at the hotel and other areas of Japan. "There are many areas with higher radiation than this place, so it's important to show the facts to the public."

Hotelli Aalto is surrounded by lakes and ponds created by the Mount Bandai eruption, and it offers access to nature at its most raw. The 13 rooms here (priced from ¥28,000 per person) are divided between those with a forest or mountain view. There is also the new Aalto Lodge a short distance from the main hotel, designed for families and even pets. Renovated in 2007, the hotel has a European mountain-lodge feel with an open-plan lobby where guests to relax and mingle. As well as indoor and outdoor natural *onsen* (hot springs), Aalto also offers Nordic and Japanese fusion cuisine.

The hotel is perched high in the mountains some 100 kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 power plant, in the far west of the prefecture. But being located within Fukushima has left it with an image problem — everything within the prefecture borders can sound toxic, even though neighboring Ibaraki and Miyagi prefectures are closer to the plant and have been more affected by the events of March 2011.

"In the first two years before the earthquake we were just growing, working toward our targets," Munakata says. "Only now we are getting to that target. In 2010, we had 30 percent capacity and now it's getting to 50 percent."

The Reconstruction Agency, tasked by the government with the rebuilding after the Great East Japan Earthquake, stated earlier this year that Fukushima tourism is still in a "severe situation" and that, due to reputational damage, Fukushima "has not been able to enjoy the effects of the national inbound surge."

In 2010, 8.6 million overseas visitors came to Japan, according to the Japan National Tourism Organization. After the 2011 disaster, every region except Okinawa saw a decrease in foreign tourists, but none more so than Tohoku, which dropped to 40 percent of its normal influx. By 2013, all regions bar Tohoku had rebounded past their 2010 numbers. Fukushima remains hit the hardest. The Reconstruction Agency shows that the number of foreign tourists staying overnight in Fukushima Prefecture fell by 70 percent in 2011 and has barely increased since.

"It's difficult to communicate the safety of the region — when information comes from the government, non-Japanese will not trust the credibility," Munakata says. "Also, saying 'It is safe' only draws attention to the issue, so it doesn't really help."

Fukushima Prefecture is itself divided into three regions: Aizu, Nakadori and Hamadori. Some in westernmost Aizu considered whether it would be beneficial to incorporate it within a neighboring prefecture in order to lose the damaging Fukushima tag. But Munakata, whose Hotelli Aalto is located in Aizu, disagrees.

"I also feel that I am responsible, we all are, to support the people on the coastal side. There are many ways to help, but what we think is important is to be able to sustain our business without (governmental) support, standing on our own feet."

Rebuilding the infrastructure to attract foreign tourists back to Fukushima, however, has required the financial support of the national government and Tepco, the owner of the Fukushima No. 1 power plant, due to the massive loss in business revenue the region has faced. According to Yoshihiro Sonobe, director of Hakko construction — the company that renovated Hotelli Aalto's 40-year-old building — financial assistance has had to come from various sources.

“Fukushima Prefecture created a system of interest compensation for loans taken out by businesses from financial institutions,” he says.

Tepco’s official figures show it has paid ¥6 trillion (\$57.6 billion) in reparations, of which ¥4,780 billion (\$4.59 billion) went to local businesses. The compensation includes an amount for lost sales due to misinformation or damage to the business’s reputation, totaling ¥1,460 billion (\$1.4 billion).

“How much of this is related to tourism though is unclear,” Sonobe says.

Since 2011, the prefectural government and Tepco have been providing an ongoing fund to each hotel to fill in their average revenue, covering the gap that they have lost. They also paid up to ¥8,000 per day for evacuees to stay in hotels until temporary homes were built, which lasted about half a year.

“We struggle because of our location, but some have recovered better,” Munakata says.

In March, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe set a target to triple international overnight visitors staying in Tohoku hotels from 500,000 in 2015 to 1.5 million by 2020, promising to boost the budget for research, promotion and marketing of a “new Tohoku” from ¥500 million (\$5 million) to ¥5 billion (\$50 million).

The Reconstruction Agency also recommended an initiative for boosting domestic educational travel.

Hotelli Aalto is perhaps better positioned than most to benefit from the government’s new drive, due to its distinct international flavor. Designed by Yoshihiro Masuko, chairman of The Scandinavian Architecture and Design Institute of Japan, it blends Japanese and north European design.

The building first opened in the 1960s as a traditional *sanso* (Japanese mountain villa). Munakata had helped maintain the villa in the 10 years before it closed in 2007 and, not wanting to see the space go to waste, decided to revive it himself.

“I was in Finland when I had to make the name of the hotel and, while I was driving, I saw the word ‘Aalto’ come on the tuner of the radio, and that inspired me,” he says. The name, meaning “small waves” in Finnish, also happens to be the surname of Finland’s most famous architect: Alvar Aalto.

Munakata hired Yoshikazu Masuko, one of Japan’s own “famous architects,” who also has a long track record of designing Nordic architecture. The Japan-meets-Scandinavia concept for the hotel is an idea supported by a shared climate — temperatures can get down to -20 degrees Celsius in both Finland and Aizu.

“The people in Finland enjoy winter, with long nights and little sunlight, by staying inside. I wanted to have that mindset within this hotel,” says Munakata.

Building on a strong demand in Japan for northern European style, the hotel is offering a lifestyle and design concept with an interior that uses only natural elements.

Unlike Japan, Scandinavia has a “culture of using chairs,” Munakata says, “but what we did was to use wood in a unique Japanese way, combining the culture of chairs with the Japanese birch of Shirakawa. We wanted to use only local wood to create this.”

This month the hotel is expanding, with the opening of Aalto Lodge, a private villa with a wooden bath separate from the main hotel. Munakata hopes it will further the hotel’s appeal to foreign tourists. Priced at around ¥80,000 for a two-night stay, the family-sized house is set within a forest a short drive from the main hotel.

“It’s all about communicating the beauty of this region, like the charming Kitashiobara Village and Ura Bandai ski resort on our doorstep,” Munakata says.

“If that eruption of Mount Bandai didn’t happen 128 years ago, we wouldn’t have this beautiful region of rich soil and fresh lakes. Japan has faced many challenges **from natural disasters** but it’s also our strength. No matter how tough the challenges are, we want to stand up and get moving again.”

For more details, visit www.hotelliaalto.com.

See also : <http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161110/p2a/00m/0na/005000c>

Nuclear evacuation drill around Tomari plant

November 13, 2016

Japan holds nuclear evacuation drill for tsunami

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161113_20/

Japan's government is holding its first drill to evacuate people living near a nuclear power plant that has been hit by a tsunami.

The 2-day exercise began on Sunday in communities near the Tomari plant in Hokkaido. It has been offline pending a government screening for a restart.

The drill was based on the scenario that the reactors had lost their cooling functions after a powerful quake and a tsunami had cut off nearby roads.

A mock warning for a major tsunami was relayed through a public address system in Tomari Village.

Residents gathered at an elementary school as evacuees and village officials explained to them that they would be transported by bus to the regional capital of Sapporo, 60 kilometers away.

In neighboring Kyowa Town, workers used heavy machinery to remove driftwood that had blocked the roads.

Inside the plant compound, paramedics in protective gear covered the interior of an ambulance to prevent contamination by radioactive materials.

Firefighters used a water cannon to stop the spread of radioactive substances. Nuclear plants have been required to have water cannons since the Fukushima accident.

Officials from the Secretariat of the Nuclear Regulation Authority and local municipalities gathered at the off-site center about 10 kilometers from the plant.

The State Minister of the Cabinet Office, Tadahiko Ito, who's in charge of nuclear disaster prevention, arrived at the center 90 minutes late because bad weather had prevented him from using a helicopter. The officials at the center had a video conference with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in Tokyo. He declared an emergency and told the officials to evacuate people within a 5-kilometer radius of the plant.

A drill for evacuating residents by bus and another to help foreign tourists will take place on Monday.

Another exercise is scheduled early next year to prepare for a possible accident at the Tomari plant during a snowstorm.

See also : <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/11/14/national/disaster-preparedness-drill-held-nuclear-power-plant-hokkaido/>

Drill staged for tsunami, nuclear accident

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161113_12/

A nuclear evacuation drill has begun in communities near an offline nuclear power plant in Japan's northern island of Hokkaido. It is the nation's first such exercise that involves central government officials and an evacuation from tsunami.

The 2-day drill started on Sunday morning, with nearly 14,000 people taking part. Officials from more than 400 organizations, including the central and local governments, are also involved.

The drill started out based on a scenario that there had been an earthquake with an intensity of 6 plus on the Japanese seismic scale of zero to 7.

The scenario also assumed that the cooling system for reactors at the Tomari power plant was no longer operating, and that a tsunami had cut off roads around the plant.

A warning of a major tsunami was broadcast in the village of Tomari, which hosts the plant. That prompted residents to evacuate by foot to an elementary school on high ground.

Village officials told them they would be bused to Sapporo, more than 60 kilometers away, due to the situation at the plant.

In the afternoon, prefectural officials will practice removing debris left by the tsunami to make roads passable.

The Tomari plant is undergoing safety screening by the Nuclear Regulation Authority for possible restart of its reactors.

Bullying of Fukushima student (follow-up)

November 16, 2016

Probe ordered into Fukushima boy bullying

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161116_26/

The mayor of Yokohama City has ordered its education board to look into why it failed to respond quickly to the bullying of a student who had evacuated due to the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident.

A third-party panel of the board determined that the boy was bullied after entering an elementary school in Yokohama. The panel said school staff and education authorities responded slowly to the problem.

Mayor Fumiko Hayashi told reporters on Wednesday that city officials failed to make good use of an anti-bullying law enacted after a spate of serious cases across the nation.

Hayashi also referred to a note in which the boy said he thought of suicide many times. She said she sensed his pain from the note and was heartbroken over his experience.

Hayashi said she wonders why the school and the board failed to help him much earlier.

Evacuee from Fukushima bullied at new school

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161116_04/

A boy who evacuated Fukushima Prefecture after the 2011 nuclear accident says he thought of killing himself many times when he was bullied at his new school.

A lawyer on Tuesday released a note that the boy wrote in July last year about what he went through at his elementary school in Yokohama, south of Tokyo.

The lawyer met reporters nearly a week after the education authorities in Yokohama recognized that the boy had been the target of bullying at the school.

They said the boy's classmates added a word meaning "germ" to his name. Some reportedly demanded money.

The boy is now in the first year of junior high school. He writes that it was always painful to be treated like a germ.

He says he thought the word meant radiation, and that's why people from Fukushima are bullied.

The boy writes that he cannot help feeling scared, as standing up to his tormentors would only make the bullying worse.

He writes that while he thought of suicide, he decided to keep living even if it's painful because so many people were killed in the 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

The lawyer quoted the boy's parents as saying that the family had been mentally driven into a corner. They criticized the school and the city's education board, saying they want their time back.

The board looked into the matter after the family asked for an investigation last December.

Yokohama Mayor Fumiko Hayashi said last week that the bullying was extremely regrettable, and it's a shame that the boy was bullied because of the Fukushima nuclear accident.

Fukushima Memory and Future App

November 11, 2016

Free app to show visitors Fukushima recovery efforts

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161116/p2a/00m/0na/006000c>

A scene from reconstruction work is displayed on a tablet screen while using the "Fukushima Memory and Future Experiential App," in this picture taken at the Fukushima Prefectural Government office on Oct. 31, 2016. (Mainichi)

FUKUSHIMA -- Prefectural authorities here have released a smartphone and tablet app showing the recovery steps the area has taken since the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, in hopes to remind visitors of the disaster and attract more tourists there.

The app -- called "Fukushima Memory and Future Experiential App" -- employs augmented reality (AR) functions and can display movies and still images of scenes such as tsunami that hit local beaches and the sight of reconstruction work when people visit 27 locations in Minamisoma and two other municipalities in the prefecture.

One part of the footage shown by the app portrays fishermen affected by the Fukushima nuclear disaster struggling to resume operations through the test fishing of whitebait.

"We want to let visitors know about Fukushima people's efforts in overcoming the quake disaster and looking toward the future," said a prefectural government official.

The free app can be downloaded from App Store or Google Play by entering the words "Fukushima taiken" in Japanese ("Fukushima" in hiragana and "taiken" (experience) in kanji).

(Related link)

<http://www.pref.fukushima.lg.jp/site/portal/arfukushimakiokutomiraitaikenn.html>

Fukushima "dummies"

November 17, 2016

Fukushima 'ghost town' uses dummies to fill sad post-3/11 void

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201611170053.html>

By TAKUYA ISAYAMA/ Staff Writer



Local women make dummies in Naraha, Fukushima Prefecture. (Video taken by Takuya Isayama)

NARAH, Fukushima Prefecture--Ghosts of the past are all around in this Fukushima town whose communities were decimated in the aftermath of the 2011 nuclear disaster.

Less than one-tenth of Naraha's residents have come home since its evacuation order was lifted, but some who did return have devised a creative solution to the population problem.

Locals have formed a group to make dummies to place them around the town in lieu of the many human inhabitants who have been absent since the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant disaster of March 2011. The results are poignant.

All residents of Naraha, Fukushima Prefecture, were ordered to evacuate the area following the triple meltdown, and were given the green light to return in September 2015.

However, only 718 residents--less than 10 percent of the town's total population--had returned to their homes as of Nov. 4 this year.

Missing their friends and neighbors, some of the returned residents started the dummy project in June this year.

Currently, five women are making mannequins, including members of local voluntary group, Nanikashitai ("I want to do something"), which numbers about 30 members.

The women gather once a month at a former elementary school building to assemble cotton-stuffed heads, wooden frames, and arms and legs made from rolled newspapers. Then, they choose outfits and dress them.

The "ages" of the figures range from two to 85, according to the women.

So far, the women have completed 28 dummies, of which more than 10 occupy seven locations, including a financial institution and a day-care facility. When they showed them at an event in the town, they had visitors name them, and they even registered them as town residents.

"We hope that the dummies will bring a smile to the faces of those who see them," said Kaneko Takahara, 68, one of the women.

Nuke accident compensation

November 17, 2016

Nuclear accident compensation system to be kept

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161117_01/

A panel of experts has agreed that the compensation system for nuclear accidents should be maintained. It imposes unlimited responsibility on power companies.

The system states that utilities bear unlimited liability for damages even if they are not at fault in nuclear accidents.

The government's Atomic Energy Commission set up a committee of experts to review the system. That's because the amount of compensation has become huge in connection with the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi accident, and a harsher business environment was expected after deregulation of the electricity market. The experts started discussions in May 2015.

At a meeting on Wednesday, many participants opposed establishing a cap on utility liability and having the shortfall covered by the government. They said residents near nuclear plants and the general public will not accept it.

Some observers say the current system creates too massive risks for utilities. Others argue the public will have to shoulder the burden if the government takes some responsibility.

The committee will also discuss an increase in the amount that power companies are required to reserve for possible compensation from about 1 billion dollars. The increase could lead to a rise in electricity rates.

Fukushima students visit plant

November 19, 2016

Fukushima students see crippled nuclear plant firsthand

By CHIKAKO KAWAHARA/ Staff Writer



Students from Fukushima High School view the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant during a tour aboard a bus on Nov. 18. The No. 1 reactor building is in the background. (Chikako Kawahara)

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201611190023.html>

OKUMA, Fukushima Prefecture--It was no ordinary outing for the 13 students from Fukushima High School.

The teenagers toured the site of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant by bus on Nov. 18 to get a firsthand look at work to decommission the reactors following the triple meltdown in 2011.

It was the first tour by youngsters since the disaster as plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. had deemed the radiation risk was too high.

Through bus windows, the students observed the damaged reactor buildings, rows of storage tanks holding contaminated water and other facilities on the sprawling nuclear complex.

"The tour made me realize that we should arm ourselves with accurate information if we want to change people's perceptions of Fukushima as a scary place," said Keika Kobiyama, a first-year student in the group. "For starters, I want to tell my fellow high school students 'We went to the plant to see for ourselves what was going on there.'"

TEPCO had previously refused to allow tours by those under the age of 18.

But the company gave the green light to this request as an exception on grounds that radiation levels had dropped significantly.

The students were each given a dosimeter as they boarded the bus for the two-hour tour. The trip was held after their parents agreed to the visit.

The students themselves had been releasing updates on the disaster for Japanese and foreign audiences by monitoring radiation levels in the prefecture and studying the decommissioning process.

See also : High school takes students to see Fukushima nuclear reactor decommissioning

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161119/p2a/00m/0na/008000c>

...Following the Labor Standards Act, which forbids employing people younger than 18 from working in places with harmful radiation, **TEPCO generally only allows people 18 or older to enter the plant.** From the time of the disaster through June of this year, TEPCO admitted around 23,000 visitors, but this was the first time it has done so for high school students. **According to TEPCO, the radiation exposure during the students' visit was at the most 10 microsieverts.** ...

Facing radiation stigma

November 17, 2016

An NHK video : **Facing radiation stigma**

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/videos/20161117160452617/>

see also:

Police warned school about extortion of bullied Fukushima boy in 2011

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/11/18/national/social-issues/police-no-avail-told-yokohama-school-2014-bullies-squeezing-cash-fukushima-boy-since-2011/#.WC7YAH2Dmos>

Kyodo

- Nov 18, 2016

YOKOHAMA – An elementary school in Yokohama ignored a police report that a transfer student from disaster-hit Fukushima Prefecture was possibly being bullied and extorted by classmates, sources said Thursday.

The local police notified the school in November 2014 that other students were demanding money from the 13-year-old boy — some ¥1.5 million (\$14,000) in sum. But the school and the Yokohama Municipal Board of Education both failed to fully respond, the sources said.

The case is sparking a reaction on the internet, where some say adults who spread rumors about nuclear radiation are to blame for the impetus for the bullying.

According to a board of education report, the bullying started immediately after the boy moved to Yokohama in August 2011 while a second-grader.

The boy was called names such as “germ,” an apparent reference to the nuclear contamination caused by the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant disaster that started in March 2011. He eventually started missing school when he was in the third grade, the report said.

In July 2014, the boy's parents reported to police that grade school classmates were extorting money from their son, and when police questioned him, they found the boy was forking over ¥100,000 at a time, which the bullies spent at game arcades and on other things.

The following month the police notified the school and the board of education about what they had been told.

In 2013, Japan enacted a law to curb bullying at schools, making it obligatory to report to the education ministry and municipalities cases deemed "serious situations," or when a student is thought to be suffering physically, mentally or economically as a result of bullying.

In this case, the school did not judge that the situation constituted a "serious situation" and did not convene a school meeting to deal with the situation. The board of education also failed to act promptly.

A board official said Thursday: "We should have acted before the Kanagawa Prefectural Police intervened in this case. The school was not fully aware that bullying was taking place and it did not think about (taking actions based on) the law."

November 19, 2016

School admits botched response to bullying of Fukushima evacuee

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161119/p2a/00m/0na/011000c>

YOKOHAMA -- The principal of an elementary school here where a Fukushima evacuee was bullied, causing him to refuse to go to school, has acknowledged inadequacies in the school's response.

- **【Related】** School failed to act on extortion of Fukushima evacuee bullied at school
- **【Related】** Note written by Fukushima evacuee bullied at new school released

The boy, now 13 and in junior high school, was bullied after his family voluntarily evacuated from Fukushima Prefecture and moved to Yokohama in the wake of the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. The boy wrote in a note that he was subject to name-calling and that his classmates demanded money from him. It was reported that education officials were aware the boy was forced to pay a total of about 1.5 million yen to his classmates, but failed to respond proactively to the case.

When questioned by the Mainichi Shimbun, the school's principal stated that the treatment the boy suffered was something "that should not happen in an educational setting." The principal said it was "heartbreaking" to think of the response at the time and the student's feelings. However, the headmaster refused to provide an explanation when asked how the school handled the bullying, saying, "The media contact is the municipal board of education."

The school's vice principal did not talk about their feelings toward the student when approached by the Mainichi, citing personal information concerns.

Kanagawa Prefectural Police, on the other hand, explained the response to date. They said that they received an inquiry from his parents about money trouble in August 2014, and had questioned relevant parties, including the boy's classmates and the school, by October. They heard that money was exchanged, but judged they couldn't deal with the case as a crime, and informed the boy's parents and the school. Prefectural police said their response was appropriate and there were no problems with how they dealt with the case.

By Nov. 18, the municipal board of education had received about 180 telephone complaints about how it and the school handled the case. One caller was quoted as saying, "I feel sorry for the victim and I'm

brought to tears," while another reportedly criticized the school and education board for their "bad" response.

The parent of one of the boy's classmates commented, "When it was rumored that he had started missing school, parents and the neighborhood association made inquiries with the school and the municipal board of education, but they didn't respond. I'm disappointed."

November 18, 2016

School failed to act on extortion of Fukushima evacuee bullied at school

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161118/p2a/00m/0na/018000c>

YOKOHAMA -- Education authorities failed to react to financial and emotional damage incurred by a boy who was bullied at his school here after evacuating from the Fukushima nuclear disaster, it has been learned.

- **【Related】** Note written by Fukushima evacuee bullied at new school released
- **【Related】** Fukushima evacuee reportedly bullied at Yokohama school
- **【Fukushima & Nuclear Power】**

The boy, who is now 13, was bullied at an elementary school in Yokohama after he transferred there from Fukushima Prefecture. Although the school and the Yokohama Municipal Board of Education were aware that the boy was forced to pay about 1.5 million yen to his classmates, they failed to respond proactively to the case. His parents had conveyed the amount to the school and education board after being informed of it by Kanagawa Prefectural Police.

According to attorneys for the student and other sources, the parents consulted with prefectural police in July 2014 about their son's classmates demanding money from him. After checking the footage of security cameras at a video arcade, prefectural police found that at least one of the bullies had squandered hundreds of thousands of yen of boy's money each time.

The money that the victim was forced to pay was spent on travel, dining and entertainment. The student was initially demanded to pay around 50,000 yen at a time, but the sum eventually snowballed.

The bully extorted the victim, saying, "You've got compensation money (for the nuclear disaster), don't you?" The victim could not confide the incidents to his parents and secretly paid the bullies using his family's money budgeted for living expenses.

The victim stopped attending school for a second time in June 2014, and his parents reported the prefectural police's investigation results to his school and the city education board. However, the school didn't deem the case a "serious situation" under the law to promote measure to prevent bullying, and shelved it.

At a Nov. 15 press conference, the city education board admitted that there was money trouble between the students. Superintendent of schools Yuko Okada said, "We should have recognized the case as serious as more than one month had passed since the student stopped attending school and the money and goods issues surfaced."

A third-party panel to the city education board criticized the school and the education board, saying, "There are no traces of their having given sufficient instructions to the parties who 'paid' and 'were paid for,' though (the education authorities) were aware of the exchange of monies in the tens of thousands of yen."

Is temporary storage the worst problem for Fukushima farmers?



Farmers harvest rice in one of Hisayoshi Shiraiwa's paddies in Katsurao, Fukushima Prefecture, on Oct. 19, 2016. Another rice paddy in the foreground serves as a temporary storage site for piles of black plastic bags containing radioactive soil. (Mainichi)

November 20, 2016

Temporary radioactive soil storage sites hinder Fukushima farmers

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161120/p2a/00m/0na/004000c>

FUKUSHIMA -- Wide swaths of temporary storage sites for radioactive soil and other waste generated from decontamination work in areas around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant are hampering locals from resuming farming, it has been learned.

The makeshift storage sites occupy roughly 1,000 hectares in total, or an area the size of 213 Tokyo Domes, across zones currently or formerly designated for evacuation in 11 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture, according to the Ministry of the Environment. The high occupancy is the result of delayed work to develop interim storage facilities for contaminated soil.

Because slightly over 90 percent of those temporary storage sites lie on farmland, local governments are deprived of the very foundation for restoring farming -- a key local industry -- in those areas while farmers are concerned about possible damage caused by harmful rumors.

According to the Environment Ministry, there are about 280 temporary storage sites in areas designated as evacuation zones. Those storage sites -- which are leased to the ministry by local farmers -- accommodate over 7 million black plastic bags containing radioactive soil, grass and branches. Those

flexible container bags -- each capable of containing 1 cubic meter of soil and other waste -- are commonly known as "flecon baggu" in Japanese.

Under the ministry plan, interim storage facilities will be built in areas totaling some 1,600 hectares in the so-called "difficult-to-return" zones in the prefectural towns of Futaba and Okuma around the Fukushima No. 1 plant. Under the scheme, radioactive soil temporarily stored at different locations in Fukushima Prefecture will be transported there for longer storage periods spanning up to 30 years before it is put to final disposal outside the prefecture.

While the ministry had initially sought to begin construction of interim storage facilities in July 2014, delays in negotiations with local residents and efforts to acquire land lots made it impossible to meet the schedule. The ministry aims to finish acquiring up to 70 percent of land necessary for the construction of interim storage facilities by the end of fiscal 2020, but the land it had managed to acquire by the end of October this year stood at a mere 170 hectares, or only 10 percent of the planned area.

The Environment Ministry estimates that up to 22 million cubic meters of contaminated soil and other waste will be generated across Fukushima Prefecture, but the interim storage facilities are expected to be able to accommodate no more than 12.5 million cubic meters of such waste by the end of fiscal 2020.

The Fukushima Prefecture village of Katsurao, where evacuation orders were lifted in most areas in June, has been pushing restoration of farming as a key policy measure. However, the total size of rice paddies in the village has dropped from some 130 hectares operated by roughly 270 households in 2010 -- prior to the Fukushima meltdowns -- to around 6 hectares operated by 11 households this year. Nearly 30 percent of the village's rice paddies totaling some 220 hectares now serve as temporary storage sites for radioactive soil and other waste.

Hisayoshi Shiraiwa, a 70-year-old farmer in Katsurao, harvested rice in his paddy in October, which is adjacent to another paddy that serves as a temporary storage site for piles of black plastic bags containing radioactive soil. As the price of rice from the area hasn't recovered to pre-disaster levels, local farmers are worried about prolonged reputational damage.

"As long as temporary storage sites remain here, farmers will lose their motivation and face a shortage of successors," Shiraiwa said.

New measures to prevent bullying

November 21, 2016

Officials in Yokohama discuss how to stop bullying after Fukushima boy's case

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/11/21/national/officials-yokohama-discuss-stop-bullying-fukushima-boys-case/#.WDLF3X2Dmos>

Kyodo

YOKOHAMA – Top officials from the education ministry and the city of Yokohama met Monday to discuss how to better prevent school bullying in the wake of the harassment of a transfer student from Fukushima.

Hiroiyuki Yoshiie, senior vice education minister, said during the meeting with Mayor Fumiko Hayashi that because there are young evacuees from radiation-hit Fukushima all around the country, the ministry will help give academic institutions “clear guidelines” to cope with bullying.

“I feel sorry that we were not able to fully understand the pupil’s situation, and staff at the education authority failed to cooperate,” Hayashi said. “We want to take preventive measures.”

Earlier this month, a third-party panel of the Yokohama Board of Education compiled a report recognizing that the boy, now 13, had been victimized by bullies and criticizing the slow response by the board and his elementary school.

The boy joined the school as a second grader in August 2011, five months after the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

He was called names such as “germ,” referring to the contamination caused by the nuclear accident, and was physically assaulted. He eventually started missing school when in the third grade, according to the report.

The bullying started immediately after the boy moved to Yokohama, but local education officials only started investigating the matter last December.

The school that he attended is suspected of ignoring a police report saying it was possible his classmates were bullying him and extorting money, according to people related to him.

Last week, the education ministry instructed the local board of education to investigate the case and make sure such problems do not recur. It also ordered school officials attending a nationwide conference to take better care of pupils who were affected by the Fukushima nuclear disaster and take swift measures against bullying of such students.

Trying to attract tourists to Fukushima

November 20, 2016

Fukushima mounts winter tourism offensive to draw foreign tourists to its snowy charms

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/11/20/national/fukushima-mounts-winter-tourism-offensive-draw-foreigners-snowy-charms/#.WDHM-32Dmos>

Fukushima Minpo

A project will kick off in Fukushima Prefecture this winter to lure more foreign tourists to its snowy hills and mountains to help revitalize depopulated regions.

For starters, the prefecture will invite tourists from Taiwan, Thailand and Australia to Okuaizu, Urabandai and southern areas of the prefecture, and subsidize nearly all of their transportation and accommodation costs. About 200 people are expected to participate.

The purpose of the project is to promote Fukushima’s name overseas, raise occupancy at its hotels and inns, and bolster jobs in its tourism industry.

The project will run until fiscal 2018. The Fukushima Prefectural Government plans to earmark about ¥17 million from the central government’s local revitalization subsidies to finance the first year.

The prefecture is coordinating with travel agencies so that areas including the towns of Minamiaizu, Kaneyama and Bandai, as well as the villages of Kitashiobara and Tenei, can welcome visitors from Australia, where skiing is very popular, and Taiwan and Thailand, where Fukushima has tourism offices. The four towns and villages will get three tours each, including an overnight journey, with the prefecture shouldering most of the transport and accommodation fees.

Each tour is designed so participants can ski, snowboard and have snowball fights in Fukushima's powder snow, as well as enjoy local snow festivals. There are also plans to reserve a ski resort for a whole weekday just for foreign visitors.

In addition, tourists will be invited to soak in hot springs to interact with local residents after experiencing snow-removal activities. This will be followed by chances to sample the local cuisine and taste sake popular at home and abroad.

Other trips are being planned to famous tourist spots along the Tadami Line, which has gained an overseas following on the internet, and to fishing spots where pond smelt can be caught in Hibara and Hatori lakes.

Once the visitors return home, the project encourages them to spread information on the ski resorts, tourist spots, food and sake they experienced via SNS.

Already, the Fukushima Prefectural Government is looking to create more tours that appeal to a wider range of countries, including China and South Korea.

It intends to set up a study group comprising officials from cities, towns, villages and local tourism associations to analyze the participants' reactions. Based on the results, the prefecture will set up multiple tourism routes to draw attention ahead of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics.

"Amid tepid demand from Japanese skiers, if the prefecture successfully emphasizes the high quality of its snow, it is possible to lure more tourists from abroad," said a source connected with a ski resort in the Aizu region.

"We'd like to design a model tour to make the mountainous areas popular in winter," an official in the prefecture's regional development section said.

Even though tourism has rebounded since the Fukushima disaster unfolded in 2011, it has not fully recovered.

Last year, foreign tourists who stayed at lodging facilities with more than 20 employees in Fukushima came to 48,090, more than double the 2011 tally, according to the Japan Tourism Agency.

But that's still far short of the 87,170 who did so in 2010, and the prefecture is hunting for more ways to raise tourism in cooperation with its neighbors in the Tohoku and Kanto regions.

This section, appearing every third Monday, focuses on topics and issues covered by the Fukushima Minpo, the largest newspaper in Fukushima Prefecture. The original article was published on Aug. 5.

November 19, 2016

Get away from the sea!

November 22, 2016

Bitter lessons of 3/11 tsunami put to use with latest quake evacuation

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201611220062.html>

REUTERS

When massive tsunami waves slammed into Japan's northeastern coast more than five years ago, about 18,000 people perished, prompting authorities to revise warning systems and evacuation plans to try to save more lives.

On Tuesday, when a magnitude 7.4 quake hit the same area, the country swung into action, using lessons learned in the 2011 disaster to ensure coastal residents evacuated well before the much smaller waves hit. Prior to 2011, warning broadcasts were mostly limited to television, radio and city officials on loudspeakers, with volunteer firemen in trucks roaming the roads, telling residents to flee to higher ground.

But on the day now known as "3/11," some of these failed due to power outages after the huge magnitude 9.0 quake, while many firefighters were killed when the waves--30 meters high in places--rushed ashore. "A lot of people told us they weren't able to hear any of the broadcasts, the waves were bigger than expected, and many went back after the first one to check things out," said Tsunetaka Omine, a disaster official in Iwaki, a city where around 460 residents died in 2011.

Iwaki now blasts warnings to every mobile phone in the area, sends email messages and broadcasts on local radio in addition to the older methods.

Previous elaborate systems designating specific evacuation centers have also been abandoned along the coast in many cases as too complicated. Some designated areas were too low and became death traps where scores seeking safety drowned.

"Now, we basically just tell people to stay away from the sea, to head to the highest possible ground," Omine said.

As a result, as sirens wailed shortly after dawn on Tuesday, ships headed out of harbors to deeper water and lines of cars snaked up nearby hills.

Public broadcaster NHK, always a key player in disaster prevention, revamped its broadcasts after 2011 in response to criticism that it had been too calm in its reporting, leading some to take warnings less seriously.

So on Tuesday, announcers abandoned their usual careful modulation for an unsettling note of urgency, repeatedly telling listeners, "Do not go near the water, a tsunami is coming!" as messages flashed on the screen in red saying "Tsunami! Run!"

And in a nod to a growing number of foreign residents, a dubbed version of the NHK channel broadcast **warnings in English, Chinese and Korean.** Several young foreign English teachers died in 2011, prompting speculation they had not known of the danger.

Kathy Krauth, a teacher with a Tokyo international school leading a dozen students on a study tour, was staying at a traditional Japanese inn in the coastal town of Ofunato and was evacuated to higher ground soon after the quake struck.

Four hours later, the group was finally allowed back to their inn--and were promptly relocated to a hotel at a higher, safer elevation.

"I felt like the lessons of 3/11 were really taken to heart," Krauth said. "The feeling was, we just don't know, but we're going to be as cautious as we can."

"I knew i had to escape"

November 22, 2016

Tohoku coastal residents rush to high ground after quake in fear

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161122/p2a/00m/0na/011000c>

Residents listen to tsunami information on the radio at a shelter in Shichigahama, Miyagi Prefecture, on Nov. 22, 2016. (Mainichi)

On the morning of Nov. 22, a powerful earthquake and tsunami hit the Tohoku region of Japan, which was hit hardest in the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. The epicenter was located off the coast of Fukushima, but shocks were felt in a wide swath of the country from Hokkaido to the Chugoku region, and tsunami warnings and advisories were issued -- and later lifted -- for the northeastern coast of Japan.

- **【Related】** M7.4 quake hits northeastern Japan, causing tsunami

Many residents on the coast of Fukushima Prefecture evacuated to public facilities and other sites on high ground. Some 80 people evacuated to Higashi Shogai Gakushu Center in the Haramachi Ward of Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture.

"My home is right across from the nursing home where many elderly people died in the tsunami caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake," said Sachiko Nakagawa, 60, a resident of the Kamishibusa district of Haramachi Ward. "When I learned that a tsunami warning had been issued, I knew I had to escape, so I jumped into my car."

Atsuko Tanabe, 62, lives in the Kaibama district of Haramachi Ward, another area that saw many casualties in the 2011 disaster. "I felt the shaking and jumped out of bed, grabbed just my wallet, cell phone and cell phone charger, and evacuated right away," she said.

Hirono Municipal Junior High School in the Fukushima Prefecture town of Hirono, where its residents had all been evacuated in the past due to the ongoing nuclear disaster, sent a text to its students early in the morning, instructing them to put their safety first. In Fukushima Prefecture, classes were cancelled for the day at 61 elementary and junior high schools and 24 high schools, primarily in the prefecture's coastal areas.

According to the Fukushima Prefectural Government, 3,119 people in the prefectural city of Iwaki had evacuated to 59 community centers and other facilities as of 9:30 a.m., and at one point, around 350 cars stood by on nearby roads. In Minamisoma, approximately 250 people had evacuated to five facilities within the city, while some 70 people evacuated to parks on high ground.

Meanwhile, there have been reports of injuries from the quake. In Iwaki, a woman in her 60s fell off her bed and suffered minor injuries, while a woman in her 20s experienced hyperventilation. Both were taken to the hospital, but their conditions are not life-threatening.

People with looks of concern stared down at the ocean from Hiyoriyama Park in the city center of Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture. Masako Kudo, 40, from the Iwate Prefecture city of Takizawa, who was on a family trip to Ishinomaki when the quake struck, held her five-year-old daughter's hand as she said,

"We're not familiar with the area so we came here, thinking that we better take action as quickly as possible."

At around 7:40 a.m., radio announcers reported that tsunami had been observed in Ishinomaki. A local 68-year-old man who was listening to the report looked worried, saying, "The tsunami might get high." He said he'd stayed in an evacuation center for over seven months after the 2011 disasters, and added, "The shaking wasn't as bad as it was then, but this reminds me of that time."

Drawing (some) lessons from 3/11

November 22, 2016

With 3/11 in mind, Fukushima residents evacuate quickly after tsunami warning

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/11/22/national/311-mind-fukushima-residents-evacuate-quickly-tsunami-warning/#.WDQ2un2Dmos>

Kyodo

SENDAI – Residents of Fukushima and nearby prefectures evacuated quickly after Tuesday's powerful earthquake rattled the Tohoku region, drawing on lessons from the 2011 tsunami disaster that claimed thousands of lives in the same part of northeastern Japan.

After the quake, which had a preliminary magnitude of 7.4, struck shortly before 6 a.m. off Fukushima Prefecture, about 30 residents of Iwaki evacuated to a local school, a designated evacuation shelter 700 meters from the shore, and gathered in classrooms on the third floor.

Nishikihigashi Elementary School in Iwaki urged its students by email to place top priority on taking refuge as emergency sirens wailed.

"A strong jolt came suddenly and the tremor lasted long," the school's vice principal said. "We want to ensure the safety of our children."

The Iwaki Municipal Government introduced an email alert system following the March 11, 2011, mega-quake and tsunami disasters. On Tuesday, it sent messages urging around 15,000 registered residents to evacuate to higher ground.

People evacuating by car caused heavy traffic jams in the city. Some 300 people took shelter at an accommodation on a hill.

"I was prepared but never expected a strong earthquake like this would come again so soon," said Hiroshi Niitsuma, a 46-year-old company employee who lost his home in the 2011 disasters.

Kazunori Yoshida, the 65-year-old head of an Iwaki fisheries cooperative, said some member ships sailed further out to sea after receiving tsunami warnings.

"Because we experienced the great earthquake (of 2011), we were able to act calmly," he said.

About 30 vessels had been operating since early morning off the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant to collect underwater debris. Yoshida said there were no reports of damage from the tsunami.

A 1.4-meter-high tsunami was observed at Sendai port in Miyagi Prefecture.

Tohoku Electric Power Co. instructed its employees at a waterfront thermal power plant in Miyagino Ward in the city of Sendai to go to the third floor or higher.

"I saw surging tsunami from the window," an employee said.

At a manufacturing plant in the area, workers who finished their night shifts were told to remain inside.

Around 60 employees stayed in a dining room on the second floor of the factory.

"I decided that if I leave now, I could be engulfed by a tsunami," one worker said.

A surge of water flowing up a river was observed in Tagajo, Miyagi Prefecture.

JR Sendai Station was crowded with people after train services were suspended. "I can't go home," said Tadashi Takahashi, a 65-year-old restaurant owner.

"The strong tremor reminded me of the (2011) disaster," said Shoetsu Chiba, 67, a farmer from the city of Ishinomaki, which was devastated by the 2011 disasters. "I hope there is no damage (this time)."

In Higashimatsushima, another city in Miyagi, some 160 residents evacuated to a civic center on a hill.

"Because my town was swallowed up by the (2011) tsunami, I thought I have to go to higher ground," said 61-year-old Keiko Sakurai.

At another shelter in the city, Setsuro Sugawara, 66, a municipal assembly member, said: "I always have a bag of disaster kits prepared. My experience in the (2011) disaster worked."

In Sendai, authorities built 10-meter-high facilities for evacuees in coastal areas following the 2011 tsunami. On Tuesday a total of around 100 people temporarily evacuated to the three two-story structures known as tsunami evacuation towers.

"A number of people came (to the evacuation towers) in a real situation, not for a drill," a city government official said. "We were able to apply lessons" from the past.

But evacuations were not as smooth in the city of Natori, also in Miyagi. While some residents tried to evacuate to the city hall, security guards refused their entry as no tsunami warning had been issued.

"They let us in only after negotiating for an hour. Their response was slow," said 42-year-old Azusa Arakawa.

Hatsumi Ohisa, the head of the city's disaster prevention division, admitted that the response was a mistake, saying, "Even when a tsunami warning was not issued, we should have opened (the government office) if requested."

November 22, 2016

Northeast Japan dodges bullet from M7.4 quake

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/11/22/national/m7-4-earthquake-off-fukushima-triggers-widespread-tsunami-alert/#.WDQ2Cn2Dmos>

Kyodo, Reuters, Staff Report

A powerful earthquake struck northeastern Japan on Tuesday morning, briefly disrupting nuclear fuel cooling functions at the Fukushima No. 2 power plant and generating tsunami of over 1 meter in the region that was devastated by the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster five years ago.

The 5:59 a.m. quake with a preliminary magnitude of 7.4 is believed to be an aftershock of the March 2011 mega-quake, the Meteorological Agency said.

It was the first quake with a magnitude of 7 or bigger to hit Japan since July 2014. The agency warned that there may be similar-scale quakes for around a week.

A tsunami measuring 1.4 meters high was observed at Sendai port in Miyagi Prefecture and a wave of about 1 meter reached the coast near the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant that was crippled by the 2011 quake-tsunami disaster.

Authorities instructed residents in coastal areas to evacuate to higher ground and hundreds of schools canceled classes. Over 3,000 people fled to evacuation centers in Fukushima Prefecture.

"The sound of sirens brought back memories of the huge earthquake (in 2011)," said Tomomi Nagakubo, 48, who drove her car to an evacuation center in Ibaraki Prefecture with her 13-year-old son.

According to the Fire and Disaster Management Agency, a total of 17 people in Fukushima, Chiba, Tokyo and Miyagi prefectures were injured as a result of the quake. They included an 82-year-old woman in Chiba who fell down some stairs in her home and fractured her hip. In Fukushima, three people were injured, two of whom were elderly women who tripped and suffered broken bones.

The cooling system for the spent fuel pool in the No. 3 reactor building at the Fukushima No. 2 power plant stopped working but was restarted about 100 minutes later, according to operator Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc.

"I have been informed that it will not immediately lead to a radiation leak or an increase in the temperature of the fuel," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said in a news conference in Tokyo.

Equipment to measure dust for radioactive materials at the Fukushima No. 2 complex also stopped working, but Tepco said the glitch did not cause any serious problems.

No abnormalities were observed at other nuclear plants in northeastern Japan, according to Tepco and other power companies. Reactors at these nuclear plants have been offline.

Sixteen small boats were overturned off the coast of Miyagi Prefecture, the Japan Coast Guard said, adding no one was believed to be onboard.

All tsunami warnings and advisories were lifted as of 12:50 p.m., the Meteorological Agency said.

The quake, which also shook the Tokyo area, measured lower 5 on the Japanese seismic intensity scale of 7 in Fukushima, Ibaraki and Tochigi prefectures, the agency said.

It was the first time since December 2012 that the agency issued a tsunami alert due to an aftershock from the 2011 quake.

Television footage showed ships moving out to sea from harbors as tsunami warnings wailed after alerts of waves of up to 3 meters were issued.

"We saw high waves but nothing that went over the tidal waves," a man in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, told NTV.

Aerial footage showed tsunami flowing up rivers in some areas, as well as the overturned fishing boats in the port of Higashimatsuyashima, Miyagi Prefecture.

The focus of the quake was about 25 km under the seabed in the Pacific Ocean off Fukushima, the agency said.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said in a news conference in Buenos Aires that the government will assess the damage and keep the public informed.

Check Fukuleaks website for updates on Fukushima recent quake

<http://www.fukuleaks.org/web/?p=15836>

check fukuleaks for updates

Seismic activity continuing

November 23, 2016

Seismic activity continues off Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161123_16/

Japanese weather officials say seismic activity is continuing off Fukushima Prefecture after a magnitude-7.4 earthquake struck the area early Tuesday morning.

They are urging people to stay alert for another possible tremor of the same strength which could strike within the next 7 days.

The officials say they had observed 85 quakes registering 1 or higher on the Japanese scale of zero to seven by 11 AM on Wednesday.

Tuesday's quake caused a 1.4-meter tsunami at Sendai Port in Miyagi Prefecture, northeastern Japan. That's the highest in the country since the huge 2011 earthquake struck the region.

Fishermen in Higashimatsushima City in the prefecture went to local ports on Wednesday to check for damage.

They said about 40 percent of 700 rafts at Satohama Port, which are used for farming seaweed, were piled up or had become entangled with one another.

Yoshinori Shitara, an official with a local fishery association, said they had just recovered from the disaster 5 years ago. He said the seaweed crop had been good this year and that he feels disappointed.

Fishermen at another port worked to salvage a ship capsized by tsunami waves. They were also trying to recover its anchor.

One fisherman said that a powerful typhoon hit the area earlier this year and he was sad to see this kind of damage again.

Tax breaks to reconstruct no-go zone?

November 22, 2016

Tax breaks mulled to aid reconstruction in Fukushima no-go zone

JIIJ

The Abe government and ruling coalition are considering giving tax breaks to companies that do business in reconstruction footholds to be set up in the no-go zone heavily contaminated by the 2011 nuclear accident in Fukushima Prefecture, according to informed sources.

Officials believe such measures will help advance industrial recovery in the prefecture hurt by the reactor meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant in March 2011, the sources said Tuesday.

Under consideration are corporate tax cuts to promote capital investment and employment of people affected by the crisis by firms damaged by the nuclear accident and companies that newly expand into the area.

The special reconstruction areas will be created starting in fiscal 2017. Priority will be given to decontamination work and infrastructure development in the footholds, so that evacuation orders for local residents can be lifted around the end of March 2022.

The tax measures will be included in the fiscal 2017 tax system reform package that the Liberal Democratic Party-led ruling coalition plans to draw up Dec. 8.

Similar tax breaks are provided in evacuation areas outside the no-go zone. Through the planned measures, the government hopes to encourage the opening of businesses necessary for residents to live in the area, such as convenience stores and gas stations, as well as promoting job creation.

The government and the ruling camp are considering the options of allowing companies to deduct from their corporate taxes 15 percent of the amounts of their capital investment made in the footholds and granting lump-sum depreciation of new equipment and facilities so they can reduce their taxable incomes by larger margins than under regular depreciation rules.

Another possible measure is giving a corporate tax cut equivalent to 20 percent of salaries for employees in the footholds that companies hire from among those affected by the nuclear accident.

Also under consideration extending by four years a corporate tax cut granted to the owners of housing for disaster victims in special economic zones on condition the buildings meet fire resistance and other requirements and that the owners give priority to disaster-affected people in choosing tenants.

Sugu Nigete!

November 23, 2016

VOX POPULI: Jolting reminder that the next 'Big One' is never far away

Vox Populi, Vox Dei is a daily column that runs on Page 1 of The Asahi Shimbun.

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201611230025.html>

In big letters on the television screen were the words "Sugu Nigete!" (Flee right now!). The thought of another killer tsunami hitting Japan filled me with dread.

Tsunami were observed along a broad coastal stretch of eastern Japan, triggered by a major earthquake that struck in the early morning of Nov. 22.

In Miyagi and Fukushima Prefectures, many people fled to higher ground. A survivor of the tsunami of March 2011 said with emotion, "I don't want to lose anything more in a tsunami." Another said, "I fled with nothing but the clothes on my back."

I was able to breathe a bit easier after hearing there was no significant tsunami damage.

"You can never tell when a quake will strike, so you just have to be mentally prepared at all times," said Rinka Imamura, a first-year student of Ogata Senior High School in Kochi Prefecture.

Imamura will be chairing an international senior high school students' summit on tsunami preparedness, slated to be held Nov. 25 and 26 in the coastal town of Kuroshio where her school is located. The biggest tsunami the town could feasibly expect is estimated at 34 meters.

On Nov. 5 this year, World Tsunami Awareness Day was observed worldwide for the first time. The date was chosen for what happened on Nov. 5, 1854, according to the old lunar calendar, in Wakayama Prefecture: Just before a tsunami was about to hit, a local businessman warned his neighbors and set fire to sheaves of rice straw to guide people to higher ground.

I hope participants in the students' summit in Kuroshio will share all of their thoughts with their peers from around the world.

Steady progress is being made in promoting disaster preparedness among the public. But during the Nov. 22 incident, traffic backups slowed and disrupted the evacuation process. And it was also revealed how difficult it was for the elderly to flee at short notice.

We all need to think about what we need to do when we must evacuate immediately.

It has been five years and eight months since the Great East Japan Earthquake, but seismic activity will continue in the region.

We must remind ourselves that the March 2011 disaster is not just a piece of history, and we might be living on borrowed time, so to speak, until the next "Big One" strikes.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Nov. 23

* * *

Can - definitely - be improved

November 23, 2016

Tsunami warning for Miyagi Pref. issued late despite prediction tech

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161123/p2a/00m/0na/007000c>

When a strong quake struck off the coast of Fukushima Prefecture in the early hours of Nov. 22, a tsunami warning was immediately issued for Fukushima Prefecture's coastal areas. However, there was a delay in issuing a tsunami warning for the coast of Miyagi Prefecture, directly north of Fukushima Prefecture, causing confusion among residents over whether they needed to evacuate.

- 【Related】 Tohoku coastal residents rush to high ground after quake in fear
- 【Related】 M7.4 quake hits northeastern Japan, causing tsunami
- 【Related】 Spent-fuel cooling at Fukushima Daiichi plant temporarily halts

When an earthquake measures lower than magnitude 8, and tsunami are expected to reach a height of more than 1 meter up to 3 meters, tsunami warnings are issued. Tsunami advisories, meanwhile, are issued when tsunami heights are expected to be at a maximum between 0.2 meters and 1 meter.

The magnitude-7.4 quake struck at 5:59 a.m. on Nov. 22. But the tsunami advisory issued for Miyagi Prefecture was not switched to a tsunami warning until 8:09 a.m., approximately six minutes after a 1.4-meter tsunami -- the tallest tsunami recorded across the country following the latest quake -- had been observed at Sendai Port. It had already been two hours and 10 minutes since the quake had hit.

"We don't know why the waves were so high at Sendai Port," a befuddled official at the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) said. "It's extremely difficult to make accurate predictions."

At 6:02 a.m., about three minutes after the earthquake occurred, the JMA issued a tsunami warning for Fukushima Prefecture, and tsunami advisories for the Pacific Coast from Aomori Prefecture in the north all the way down to Chiba Prefecture near Tokyo.

The height and arrival times of tsunami are calculated using a database with some 100,000 possibilities that take into consideration such factors as the magnitude, location and depth of a quake. To increase the accuracy of these calculations, data taken from the surface of the ocean and the ocean floor by GPS wave gauges installed about 20 kilometers offshore by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism is also used. Despite such data, the JMA was unable to predict the 1.4-meter tsunami, ultimately issuing a tsunami warning after the wave had already hit.

According to the JMA, not only is seabed topography more complicated closer to land than offshore, waves can grow irregularly in height after crashing into the coast. At a press conference held at JMA headquarters, senior coordinator for seismological information Koji Nakamura said, "We will analyze the causes for the delay, and consider making changes to our tsunami prediction database if necessary."

The delay in issuing a tsunami warning affected residents' evacuation.

The Miyagi Prefecture city of Higashimatsushima responded to the tsunami warning by cancelling classes at 11 municipal elementary and junior high schools. Yet, a total of 78 students attending two elementary schools arrived at their respective schools, because the school cancellation notification emails failed to reach their parents in time. Looking back on what happened, an official with the Higashimatsushima Municipal Board of Education said, "It was difficult to determine when we should make the decision to cancel classes."

In the city center of Ishinomaki, residents trying to evacuate to high ground by car surged from around 8 a.m., causing traffic jams. Some 150 cars gathered at Ishinomaki Junior High School and Kadonowaki Junior High School -- both municipal schools on high ground -- forcing school officials to open up their school yards to the public. "As soon as the tsunami advisory was switched to a tsunami warning, people began arriving in droves," the vice principal at Kadonowaki Junior High said. "It drove home the fact that residents remember the 2011 disaster and take tsunami warnings seriously."

Experts have pointed out that the traffic jams caused by people fleeing by car in the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster were an issue that needed to be resolved. Indeed, the traffic jams that occurred following the latest quake were not limited to Miyagi Prefecture.

On a prefectural road running inland from Onahama, a coastal area of the city of Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, traffic was backed up by almost 1 kilometer for about an hour starting at 6:30 a.m. The city's disaster plan drafted after the March 2011 disasters stipulates that evacuation should generally take place on foot; at a disaster drill carried out on Nov. 5, participants walked to designated evacuation sites. An official at the Iwaki Municipal Government's Onahama outpost speculated on the reasons why many residents chose to evacuate by car, saying, "It allows people to stay warm, and to escape together with their families."

No major damage was reported from the quake or tsunami, but there is much improvement needed in tsunami prediction techniques and evacuation methods. Shinji Toda, a professor at Tohoku University's

International Research Institute of Disaster Science (IRIDeS) said, "Coastal areas in the Tohoku region must be vigilant toward massive earthquakes and tsunami for another 10 to 20 years."

Bullied (follow-up)

November 24, 2016

Bullied boy from Fukushima feels 'rewarded' by online reaction

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201611240065.html>

By KOJI OMORI/ Staff Writer

A boy from Fukushima Prefecture wrote about killing himself because of bullying at a Yokohama school. But he didn't want to become another victim of the 3/11 disaster. (Dai Nagata)

YOKOHAMA--A Fukushima boy derided as "germ" and "radiation" by his elementary school classmates here has taken solace in the fact that his story may be saving the lives of other victims of bullying. The boy himself had often thought about killing himself after his family moved to Yokohama following the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011. But he decided to live through the pain and cruelty inflicted by his classmates at the public school.

"I am aware that many children in Japan suffer bullying, but I appeal to them that they should never ever choose to die because there are people out there who will extend a helping hand," his parents quoted the boy, 13, as saying.

The parents, speaking on condition of anonymity, held a news conference in Yokohama on Nov. 23 in response to requests by reporters. It was held after the boy's notes about his ordeal were made public on Nov. 15 through his lawyer.

The notes resonated with a number of children facing similar circumstances.

One person posted on the Internet: "His notes gave me the courage to live."

According to the parents, their son read the post and said he felt "rewarded by his perseverance."

The boy's bullying case stood out from others because of the questionable response by school officials and local education board officials, the handing over of money, and the taunts related to the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

When the boy was a second-grader, he and his family fled to Yokohama from Fukushima Prefecture in August 2011. Although their home was outside the central government-designated evacuation zone, the family was worried about radiation from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Soon after he entered the school in Yokohama, the bullying started.

In May 2014, when the boy was in the fifth grade, he paid his tormentors about 1.5 million yen (\$13,600) to cover their expenses for outings at game arcades and amusement parks, according to his lawyer. The children insisted that he should pay, citing the compensation they believed his family received for the nuclear accident.

The parents told the news conference that they brought up the bullying at a meeting with school officials in June that year.

They suggested that a third-party panel look into their son's "grave case" in line with an anti-bullying law that went into force in 2013.

But the school officials dismissed their suggestion.

According to the parents, the officials said the boy took the initiative in taking his tormentors to game arcades.

The mother said she feels it is inevitable for people to associate residents of Fukushima Prefecture with compensation payments.

She said the family has received "only hundreds of thousands of yen" in compensation, and that the money was used to cover relocation and other costs.

The money the boy took from home came from a loan the parents received from relatives, the mother said.

She said she also wonders what her son's bullies talked about with their parents at home.

"I am afraid that only parents would mention the compensation money," she said.

The boy graduated from an elementary school this spring and now attends a "free school," an alternative institution for absentee children.

Inexcusable response to bullying

November 24, 2016

Inexcusable response in bullying case

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2016/11/24/editorials/inexcusable-response-bullying-case/#.WDgDQn2Dmos>

The bullying in Yokohama of an elementary school student who was evacuated from Fukushima Prefecture following the March 2011 nuclear disaster highlights an apathetic attitude on the part of school officials and the municipal board of education. They deserve severe criticism for their inaction and lack of awareness of the difficulties faced by Fukushima evacuees. Behind the bullying was the prejudice held by some students against evacuees from the areas impacted by the disaster's radiation fallout. It's easy to imagine that similar bullying is happening in other parts of the country against children of similar circumstances.

The bullies' attitude toward Fukushima evacuees can likely be attributed to the prejudice and misunderstanding that adults around them have about the prefecture and its residents. It is important for adults to have an accurate understanding of what has happened in Fukushima so they can properly educate their children on the issue. Parties concerned, including the national and local governments, should make serious efforts to disseminate proper information about Fukushima and the hardships that evacuees have endured.

Soon after the boy moved to the school in Yokohama as a second-grader in August 2011, some classmates started to call him names such as "germ." Then they began to physically assault him. The next year the bullying got so severe that he didn't attend school from June till October. When he returned, the bullying resumed and in 2014 escalated to the point where some classmates began to extort money from him. The boy said that in demanding the money, the classmates told him his family must have been given compensation for damage from the nuclear disaster — a statement that demonstrates a callous attitude

toward those who experienced severe suffering as a consequence of the three reactor meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. In total, his classmates extorted about ¥1.5 million. Because of the persistency of the bullying, the boy refused to go to school throughout fiscal 2015, when he was in the sixth grade.

It is reported that when the boy was in the second and third grades, his homeroom teachers told his tormentors to stop the bullying, but the school did little else to help him. In a note about the situation, the boy wrote, "I appealed to teachers many times, but they did not believe me. ... They ignored me." His parents told authorities at the school and the Yokohama Board of Education in 2014 about the bullying and asked them to take proper action. The school held meetings of teachers concerned and questioned the boy's classmates, but it did not take further action on the grounds that the testimonies by the boy and his classmates did not match and it was impossible to determine if he had been bullied. The school officials' inaction is deplorable given the severity of the bullying and the fact that the boy repeatedly asked teachers for help. Moreover, they failed to follow a requirement under the 2013 law to combat bullying that a school must form a third-party panel for investigation should "serious situations" of bullying develop.

The school's inaction prompted the parents to report the money problem to the police. But even after the police — based on their interviews with the boy and the bullies — told the school that he paid them ¥1.5 million, the school would not act and turned down a request from the parents to hold a meeting of people from both the victim's and the bullies' sides. The board of education took no action, either.

The parents eventually asked the board of education last December to take action on the basis of the 2013 law's provision. This month, a third-party committee accordingly formed issued a report that determined the bullying against the boy began soon after he moved to Yokohama and condemned the school and the board of education, stating that their attitude was tantamount to "abandonment of education."

The slow response of the teachers at the school and board of education officials demonstrates their lack of empathy toward the boy and other people who have experienced great suffering. They should be the first to be educated about the plight of Fukushima residents. The Yokohama case also suggests that parents should not hesitate to rely on lawyers and the police if school officials and boards of education are unresponsive to their complaints about bullying.

EDITORIAL: Board's failure to disclose facts hurts efforts to prevent bullying

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201611240026.html>

The Yokohama municipal board of education is failing to provide effective support to schools and teachers struggling with the problem of bullying. Specifically, the board is withholding valuable information about a high-profile case of bullying against a boy from disaster-hit Fukushima Prefecture.

The education board has instructed municipal elementary, junior and senior high schools in the city to make "exhaustive efforts" to tackle the problem. But the board is not offering many of the important facts it has learned about the case involving the boy, who transferred to a Yokohama elementary school for safety after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

The board's instructions were based on the recommendations of an independent committee, which was asked by the board to investigate the case under the law to promote measures to prevent bullying.

The board's decision is puzzling. Of the committee's 26-page report, only seven pages concerning the committee's recommendations and the table of contents have been published. And even the pages that have been published include many blacked-out parts.

The published document offers few of the vital facts on which the committee's recommendations were based. It does not include information on what kind of problematic behavior was involved, how the school and the education board regarded the situation, and what actions they actually took.

The victim became a target of bullying after he moved to Yokohama with his family to escape the possible health hazards following the nuclear accident.

Some classmates at his new school attached "kin," which means "germ," to his name, suggesting he was contaminated. The boy started refusing to attend classes after years of cruel treatment, including being made to pay money to the bullies so they could play arcade games. His tormentors said the boy's family was being well-compensated by the government for the nuclear disaster.

The details that set this case apart from ordinary school bullying stories have been revealed mostly by the boy's lawyers at news conferences. These pieces of information do not appear in the published report. Both the school and the education board were adequately aware of the serious bullying case. Why did they fail to view what was happening as a grave situation?

Teachers can learn real lessons from the case only if they know the details of what actually transpired, including exchanges between people involved and how the school hesitated to take effective action.

The head of the education board said it decided to publish only parts of the report out of consideration to the effects of full disclosure on the children's "future growth."

Such consideration is, of course, necessary, given that both the victim and the abusers are still junior high school students.

But the board's decision has gone beyond a reasonable degree of consideration to the well-being of the children.

The board's handling of the report raises suspicions that it is trying to conceal the mistakes committed by the school and the board itself.

Since the law to prevent school bullying came into effect, independent committees have compiled similar reports on bullying cases for more than 10 municipalities.

Many of these reports cited such problems as insufficient sharing of information within the schools and teachers' isolated efforts to deal with the situation.

But few of them delved into the causes and backgrounds of the bullying incidents. There is much room for improvement in the system.

Summaries of reports have been published to emphasize important facts while giving consideration to privacy issues. The Yokohama municipal government should try to learn from such efforts of other local governments.

Vital information included in reports on bullying cases should be shared among schools so they can identify the causes of the mistakes made and improve their own responses to such situations.

Unless this mechanism is firmly established, the system does little to prevent a recurrence.

Parents irate over tardy responses to Fukushima evacuee bullied at school

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161124/p2a/00m/0na/009000c>

YOKOHAMA -- The parents of a boy who was bullied at his school here after evacuating from the Fukushima nuclear disaster expressed their anger at education authorities' slow responses to the case, as they met media representatives on Nov. 23.

- **【Related】** School failed to act on extortion of Fukushima evacuee bullied at school
- **【Related】** Note written by Fukushima evacuee bullied at new school released
- **【Related】** Fukushima evacuee reportedly bullied at Yokohama school

"They were tardy in every way. They wouldn't listen to our complaints and our distrust in them only grew stronger," one of the parents said about measures taken by the elementary school the boy attended and the Yokohama Municipal Board of Education, which had ignored the case for over a year.

The boy, who is now 13, was bullied at an elementary school in Yokohama after he transferred there from Fukushima Prefecture. "Our son's right to receive an education was infringed upon. We regret that he couldn't have a good time together with his friends," one of the parents -- both in their 40s -- said.

Recalling the time their son was being bullied, one of the parents said, "The way our son was bullied would have made it look only natural if he had taken his own life. He was torn apart." They continued, "We'd like to let people know our son's words, 'You can't speak out if you die. There should definitely be adults out there who will help you.'"

The boy's classmates started demanding he give money to them in May 2014, saying, "You have compensation money (for nuclear disaster victims), don't you?" The boy's father studied the provisions of a law to promote measures to prevent bullying and demanded that the school respond to the case under the law, arguing that the transaction of some 1.5 million yen between children would constitute a "serious situation." However, the school didn't take the case seriously and even sometimes spoke on the premise that "the boy was paying the money (to the bullies) on his own initiative," the father said. "We had no way out. We just felt helpless."

A note the boy wrote when he was in the sixth grade reads in part, "I thought about killing myself time and again. But then I thought I would live on even though it's hard because so many people died in the quake disaster (in 2011)." The note, which was highly publicized after its release recently, was written in front of his mother in July 2015, according to the parents. The boy had already stopped attending school by then. "I was at a loss for words" from being shocked at what he wrote, the mother said. "In case of a worst-case scenario, I made sure to stay with him always," she said. When he wrote the note, the boy tore pages from a notebook on a desk and took his mood out on them, resulting in the poor handwriting, according to the mother.

The boy's character and way of thinking changed after the nuclear disaster, the parents said. "He used to be an ordinary boy who would depend on his parents, but he started to put up with things. We guess he couldn't tell us what he was going through at his school after transferring there."

The school used to give consideration to children who evacuated from Fukushima voluntarily right after the boy started attending the school, but such measures stopped after he was in the fourth grade. "I asked my son's homeroom teacher if they had ever studied the psychology of children who underwent a disaster, and the teacher replied no."

The city education board has yet to disclose the details of the bullying case. "The school and the education board appear to be trying to put a lid on the problem just to protect themselves. We believe they are not only trying to avoid specifying the bullies and the victim," the mother said.

The boy currently attends an alternative school and has come to tell his parents that he wants to ride a bicycle on holidays. The parents quoted the boy as saying, "To those who are bullied like I was, I want them to live on no matter how much the pain."

Fukushima evacuee bullied by Yokohama classmates issues appeal against suicide

Kyodo

YOKOHAMA – A 13-year-old boy in Yokohama who was bullied by classmates after evacuating from nuclear crisis-hit Fukushima has made public plea urging young people suffering a similar ordeal not to consider death as the answer to their problems.

“There are adults who will definitely be there to help. It is painful but please do not choose to die,” the boy said in a message conveyed by his parents at a news conference in Yokohama, where he was harassed while at elementary school.

The identity of the boy, now in junior high school, is being withheld by the media, but the case has highlighted the need to do more for young evacuees from Fukushima around the country.

The parents, in their 40s, said their son, who had stopped going to school and often stayed home due to bullying, has started to go outdoors recently.

They said he told them that he now enjoyed going to his current free school, an alternative school for children who cannot attend classes at traditional schools for various reasons.

“My child is starting to see the light,” his father said.

His mother said: “My son was really devastated. I think he is still suffering.

“I want children to have compassion for others and teachers to teach them to develop it,” she added.

Five months after the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, the boy joined the school as a second-grader in August 2011 and soon became a target of bullying. He started missing school when in the third grade.

According to a report of a third-party panel of the city’s board of education released earlier this month, the boy was mocked with names such as “germ,” referring to the nuclear contamination caused by the disaster, and was physically assaulted.

When he was in the sixth grade, the boy wrote in his notes, “I feel terrible as I’m treated like a germ and I know it’s because of the radiation.”

His notes went on to say, “I thought of killing myself many times but I decided to live because so many people have died” in the massive earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

The boy said he told his teachers about the bullying but was ignored. In the report, the school and board, which only began investigating the case last December, were criticized for their slow response in addressing the issue.

The father said, “I want them to explain why they could not deal” properly with the case. Neither the board nor the school has offered the family an apology.

Fukushima disaster: 20 trillion yen...or more

November 28, 2016

Cost of Fukushima disaster expected to soar to ¥20 trillion

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/11/28/national/cost-fukushima-disaster-expected-soar-%c2%a520-trillion/#.WDw2kX2Dmos>

Kyodo

The overall cost of wrapping up the Fukushima nuclear disaster is now estimated at more than ¥20 trillion, nearly double the previous estimate, sources familiar with the matter said Monday.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, which previously put the overall cost at ¥11 trillion, is considering passing on a portion of the costs, including for compensation and the decommissioning of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, to consumers via higher electricity prices, the sources said.

The aged, six-reactor plant, operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co. Holdings Inc., was plunged into a blackout by the March 2011 earthquake and subsequent tsunami, leading to three core meltdowns and the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl in 1986.

According to the new estimate, Tepco's compensation payments will rise to ¥8 trillion from ¥5.4 trillion and decontamination costs will double to around ¥5 trillion.

Trillions more will be needed to decommission the reactors and deal with radioactive water at the plant, on top of the ¥2 trillion earlier estimated, the sources said.

The ministry has been discussing reforming crisis-hit Tepco and is about to draft a plan for the utility based on the new estimate within this year.

Combined with the cost of building interim waste storage facilities, foreseen to remain at ¥1.1 trillion, the total cost is forecast to surpass ¥20 trillion, the sources said.

The government is studying the possibility of expanding a ¥9 trillion interest-free loan program for Tepco that was set up by issuing government bonds to cover compensation payments and decontamination costs in areas hit by the disaster.

It is expected to take up to 30 years to recover the ¥9 trillion through payments from Tepco and other big utilities.

The government also plans to recover the expected increase in compensation payments and decontamination expenses by raising charges for transmission line usage for new electricity retailers.

In principle, Tepco needs to secure funds on its own for decommissioning the plant. The government will manage the funds, which will be established using profits generated by the utility. But it is not clear if Tepco alone can shoulder the cost.

Fukushima plant decommissioning, compensation costs to almost double: gov't est.

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161128/p2a/00m/0na/006000c>

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry estimates that the cost of decommissioning the disaster-stricken Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant and compensation for disaster damage would top a total of 20 trillion yen -- almost twice the previous government forecast, it has been learned.

- 【Related】 Fukushima nuclear plant decommissioning cost to surge
- 【Related】 High school takes students to see Fukushima nuclear reactor decommissioning

As the government is planning to have major utilities and smaller power companies that newly entered into the power market after its liberalization shoulder part of the snowballing financial burdens,

consumers are certain to face increased electricity bills. The ministry is set to draw a conclusion later this year possibly based on the estimate after continuing discussions at an expert panel on the management reform of plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) and on measures to secure financial resources.

The government had previously estimated that a total of 11 trillion yen would be needed to cover the projects -- 5.4 trillion yen for nuclear damage compensation, 2.5 trillion yen for decontaminating areas affected by the nuclear disaster, 1.1 trillion yen for building interim storage facilities for radiation contaminated soil and 2 trillion yen for decommissioning reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. In the latest estimate, the compensation cost is expected to surge to roughly 8 trillion yen and the decontamination cost is estimated at somewhere around 4-5 trillion yen. It is also highly likely that the decommissioning cost would spike by several trillion yen. The development cost for interim storage facilities remains unchanged.

The previous government estimate was calculated toward the end of 2013, but the coverage of nuclear damage compensation has since increased and decontamination efforts are taking longer than expected. The decommissioning cost has also expanded especially for work to salvage nuclear fuel debris from the 2011 meltdowns. The ministry had earlier projected that the yearly cost for these projects would reach hundreds of billions of yen from the current 80 billion yen.

The government had heretofore explained that: the compensation cost would be temporarily paid by the Nuclear Damage Compensation and Decommissioning Facilitation Corp. (NDF) before being covered by TEPCO and other major utilities; the decontamination cost would be covered by the government after it sells the TEPCO shares that it owns; revenue from the power resources development promotion tax would be used for the construction of interim storage facilities; and the reactor decommissioning cost would be secured by TEPCO.

The government is now looking into boosting the amount temporarily covered by the NDF, while tacking the snowballing compensation cost onto major utilities and new power providers that use power grids operated by existing power transmission companies. The power grid usage fees, which require government approval, are ultimately to be passed on to consumer electricity bills.

As it is highly likely that the proceeds from the sale of TEPCO shares are too small to cover the decontamination cost, the government is mulling demanding TEPCO and other utilities share the financial burden. In that case, the expenses may likely be passed onto electricity bills.

The government will consider establishing a system in which TEPCO accumulates funds through business streamlining efforts to cover the decommissioning cost. As it is widely deemed difficult to cover the cost only through management efforts, however, the expenses may likely be -- again -- tacked onto power bills.

Children's Fund for Thyroid Cancer

November 28, 2016

Thyroid cancer fund to defray costs for young patients in Fukushima, 14 other prefectures

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/11/28/national/thyroid-cancer-fund-defray-costs-young-patients-fukushima-14-prefectures/#.WDw2z32Dmos>

Kyodo

A fund supporting children with thyroid cancer said Monday it will pay part of the medical costs for young patients in Fukushima Prefecture and elsewhere in Japan.

The fund, called 3.11 Children's Fund for Thyroid Cancer, will offer up to ¥200,000 to each patient 25 and under in 15 prefectures mainly in northeastern and eastern Japan, including Tokyo.

The regions were selected in accordance with various atmospheric dispersion models for radioactive iodine spread during the Fukushima nuclear crisis in 2011.

The fund will accept applications between December and March. After review, it will provide ¥100,000 for each case and additional ¥100,000 for relatively serious patients. A second round of applications will be accepted again from April.

The fund was initially promoted by politicians including former Prime Ministers Junichiro Koizumi and Morihiro Hosokawa, and supported by celebrities such as actress Sayuri Yoshinaga. It has received ¥20 million in donations from the public since September.

Some Japanese researchers published a report attributing most of the thyroid cancer cases found among children and adolescents after the disaster began to radiation spewed by the triple core meltdown at the tsunami-swamped Fukushima No. 1 power plant.

Private fund to help young thyroid cancer patients

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161128_17/

A Japanese private foundation will offer financial aid to young people who have been diagnosed with thyroid cancer since the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The foundation said on Monday it will provide a lump sum of 100,000 yen, or about 900 dollars, starting next month.

People aged 25 years old and younger who have been diagnosed with thyroid cancer, including suspected cases, are eligible for the aid. They should be residents of Fukushima or one of the 14 other prefectures in eastern Japan.

The foundation says it has raised about 20 million yen in public donations to help them.

Fukushima Prefecture has been conducting medical checkups for about 380,000 children aged 18 or younger after the 2011 accident. 175 have been diagnosed with thyroid cancer or are suspected cases.

The foundation's representative, Hisako Sakiyama, says these young people will have to live with the risk of cancer for many years. She says the foundation wants to provide psychological support as well.

Applications for the financial aid will be accepted through March next year

Governor Mitazono: "A mere publicity stunt" before the election?

November 29, 2016

Governor under fire as Sendai nuclear reactor likely to restart

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201611290066.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

KAGOSHIMA—Anti-nuclear activists are castigating Governor Satoshi Mitazono, saying the politician has retreated from his campaign promises regarding the planned restart of a nuclear reactor in the prefecture. Despite stressing that he would take a hard look at safety issues, Mitazono's actions on Nov. 28 indicate that Kyushu Electric Power Co. will be allowed to restart the No. 1 reactor at its Sendai plant on Dec. 8 as was expected.

"What he had done over the past months now appears to be a mere publicity stunt," said Yukio Taira, chief of a confederation of labor unions in Kagoshima Prefecture.

Taira withdrew his candidacy in the governor's race in July after he and Mitazono agreed on many policy measures toward a temporary halt of operations at the nuclear plant in Satsuma-Sendai.

Mitazono on Nov. 28 submitted to the prefectural assembly a budget proposal for establishing an expert panel on nuclear power generation--a centerpiece of his campaign pledges.

"I will make a comprehensive judgment on how to respond when the panel releases its findings of the utility's reports on 'special checks,'" Mitazono told the assembly session, referring to the reactor restart plan.

However, given that a governor does not have the legal authority to order a halt, the No. 1 reactor will probably already be running by the time those findings are released.

The assembly is expected to vote on the budget request for the panel on Dec. 16. Kyushu Electric is scheduled to release the outcome of its special checks in early January.

The utility agreed to carry out the additional checks in response to the new governor's concerns. These inspections, including checking bolts fastened on barrels containing nuclear waste, are nothing new and have been done in the past, according to Kyushu Electric.

Two reactors at the Sendai plant were the first in the nation to go online under new nuclear safety regulations set up after the 2011 nuclear disaster in Fukushima Prefecture.

The No. 1 reactor has been shut down for maintenance since October. The No. 2 reactor is scheduled to be taken offline in December for a routine inspection.

Mitazono, a former TV journalist, was elected on campaign promises to take a "strong response regarding a reactor restart if the envisaged committee deems the plant unsafe."

Concerns over the safety of the nuclear complex arose when roads and other infrastructure were damaged in a series of powerful quakes that began rattling neighboring Kumamoto Prefecture in April.

After gaining support from anti-nuclear groups, Mitazono won the race against the incumbent, who was seen as friendlier toward nuclear power generation.

But after he took office, Mitazono appeared to back off from his campaign promises.

He did request an “immediate halt” of plant operations to Michiaki Uriu, president of Kyushu Electric, in late August and early September.

After the company refused the governor’s requests, Mitazono decided not to pursue the issue, saying a governor does not have the legal authority to demand a halt to operations.

He tried to assuage public concerns about the safety of the plant, citing the extra special checks the utility promised to conduct.

Taira said Mitazono has rejected repeated requests for a meeting with him and other anti-nuclear activists. They have asked Mitazono to quickly establish the expert panel for possible action to counter Kyushu Electric’s reactor restart plans. But the governor did not reply.

Mitazono also did not submit a budget request for the expert panel in the September session.

When asked by reporters, Mitazono merely kept saying he would establish the panel “as soon as possible.” “He is breaking the campaign promise if he allows the resumption of the plant without obtaining the conclusion of the panel,” Taira said.

According to one source, the governor told an informal gathering of members of the Liberal Democratic Party, the largest group in the assembly, that he shares the LDP’s direction in nuclear power policy.

(This article was written by Takeshi Nakashima and Sei Iwanami.)

Bullying probably not isolated case

November 27, 2016

2nd Fukushima boy speaks up about bullying in new schools

By MIKI AOKI/ Staff Writer

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201611270040.html>

In a troubling development, the bullying of students who fled the Fukushima nuclear disaster is apparently more widespread than the boy whose ordeal in Yokohama recently attracted much media attention and generated public sympathy.

A junior high school boy in Tokyo also has recounted his agonizing experiences of becoming the target of harassment, which continued off and on in his first and second elementary schools in the capital.

“Unless a person who experienced it speaks up, a true picture of bullying cannot be conveyed to the public,” the boy, accompanied by his parents, told of his decision to come forward in an interview with The Asahi Shimbun.

When the boy evacuated from Fukushima Prefecture in 2011, following the nuclear accident in March that year, he was in the second grade. All he could take with him from his home in the scramble to flee were a few clothes. He could not bring his school backpack or textbooks.

At his new school, he soon found himself being bullied by his classmates, including girls.

"Your germs will infect us," one said, while another jeered, "What you touch will be contaminated."

Still another commented, "You are living in a house for free."

He took down a drawing that was on a classroom wall alongside those of other children after he found some classmates had scribbled disparaging comments on it.

At the school, students formed small groups with their desks when they have school lunch. But students in his group avoided doing so with him.

After the boy tried to join them by pushing his desk toward theirs, a homeroom teacher called his parents to urge him to improve his behavior, saying that their son was "restless."

The boy finally began to refuse to go to school.

"I cannot stand up due to pain in my legs," he complained to his parents.

His mother decided to transfer him to a new school only several months after he was enrolled in the Tokyo school.

But the boy quickly discovered that the new situation was not much different from his former school.

A teacher introduced him as a Fukushima evacuee in front of the entire school. Soon children asked him how much compensation money his family had received. They also told him that his family must live in a nice home for free just because they were evacuees.

In the face of such bullying at his new school as well, the boy made the wish that he would be strong enough to persevere through the difficulties.

His mother finally took action to help her son when he was a fifth-grader. She brought up his troubles during her talks with his homeroom teacher.

Until then, though concerned, she restrained herself from speaking out in the crowd as several Fukushima evacuees were also attending the school.

"If I spoke out in a strong tone, I might have caused trouble for other evacuees," the mother said of her feelings at the time.

But her patience ran out.

In response to her pleas, the boy's homeroom teacher asked her to "wait three months," and the bullying stopped.

But the harassment continued at the boy's cram school.

A few children from the same school were also enrolled at the cram school, and they, coupled with students from other schools, continued taunting him where the homeroom teacher's oversight did not reach.

After a child dropped the boy's shoe in the lavatory basin, he was told, "This is your home."

The boy mustered the courage to resist when another child, showing him a pet bottle containing leftover food, said the bullying would stop if he consumed it.

The mother, alerted by her son, reported the harassment to cram school officials and the situation improved after that.

The boy said his relationships with his new classmates were good after he entered a junior high school away from his home.

Although he did not reveal that he is an evacuee, he did not become the target of bullying even after his classmates later found out by accident.

"I was under the impression that I was not equal to my peers as I was an evacuee at my elementary school," the boy said. "Children were in an environment that barely accepts individuality and those with differing backgrounds, and an evacuee was viewed as an individual with an abnormal trait."

The parents said his family, evacuating from outside the evacuation zone, did receive compensation, but only a fraction of the sum a family from the evacuation zone was entitled to.

The family's access to free housing will end in March.

"I am so worried about my future because I have no clue as to our life after that," he said.

Yuya Kamoshita, who heads a group of evacuees in the Tokyo metropolitan area, said the organization received five other complaints about bullying, in addition to the boy's case.

He said many children from Fukushima are routinely derided as "a germ" or "dirty" in association with the disaster at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

"People around the children who call out those taunts must know about their behavior," he said. "School officials should make a firm response."

Opening of Fukushima Medical Device Development Support Center

November 30, 2016

Fukushima strives to become leader in making medical devices

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201611300009.html>

By HIROKI KOIZUMI/ Staff Writer

KORIYAMA, Fukushima Prefecture--Surgery can help save and rebuild lives--and it's hoped it will have the same rejuvenating effect on this whole region, too.

The March 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident might have severely wounded Fukushima, but did not kill it, and a new facility here to support firms producing medical equipment could go a long way in patching up the prefecture by making it a leading light in the production of such equipment.

The Fukushima Medical Device Development Support Center, which opened on Nov. 7, is a one-stop institute that offers assistance to small and midsize firms that make medical apparatus products at all stages from development to commercialization.

The center, the first of its kind in Japan, is expected to become the core of the healthcare industry in Fukushima Prefecture, and its officials anticipate that corporations not only in Japan but also from overseas will be interested in using it.

There are also growing expectations that the support center will help the prefecture establish its reputation as a leading medical equipment producing area in Japan.

"Trade will be promoted at companies in the prefecture, the healthcare industry reconstructed and employment increased, with the new facility at the center, so that it will contribute to the growth of all industries," said Fukushima Governor Masao Uchibori at the opening ceremony of the center.

It was attended by 250 people or so, 21 of whom, including a lawmaker, a bureaucrat and officials from various organizations, cut a ceremonial ribbon together.

The primary goal of the facility is to provide support measures for 150 clinical instrument parts makers in Fukushima Prefecture to help them manufacture and sell their own products, not just receive contract work from their client companies.

Business operators need to obtain permission from the central government to market medical devices.

Winning marketing approval is often difficult for small and midsize companies with limited resources, so some abandon plans to release their products, according to prefectural officials.

Even when they succeed in obtaining permission, small and midsize companies typically do not have strong sales networks, making it difficult to sell far and wide.

The support center gives administrative support to help medical equipment manufacturers secure marketing permission. It also has equipment and devices for safety tests.

Both biological testing using pigs and other animals and chemical tests are necessary to gain approval from the central government. But as the two types of tests require different expertise, they normally have to be conducted at different testing institutions.

However, both kinds of tests can be carried out at the new Fukushima facility.

The center also intends to put smaller companies in touch with large corporations to bolster their sales networks and promote their expansion into overseas markets.

Another objective of the facility is improving the techniques of physicians.

At a surgery simulation room, surgeons can practice their skills. As the center is outfitted with other cutting-edge devices as well, it has received inquiries even from outside Japan, according to center officials.

The Fukushima prefectural government cites the healthcare industry as a main pillar of its efforts to recover from the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident. That is largely because the market of clinical equipment is expected to further grow in tandem with the accelerated aging of Japanese society.

Although production of auto parts currently accounts for a large portion of the manufacturing industry in the prefecture, the industry is expected to shrink as the use of electric cars, which need fewer components, spreads.

In contrast, medical instruments worth 2.8 trillion yen (\$25 billion) are currently sold, and the market is estimated to further expand.

In addition, clinical device makers typically produce various products in small quantities, and it is not hugely expensive to run such a business, making it easier for small and midsize companies that have advanced technologies to enter into the market.

There are many subcontractors in the prefecture that make both car parts and components for medical equipment, so it is not difficult for these companies to shift their emphasis to clinical instruments.

Assistance from the central government has also accelerated the trend since the 2011 disaster.

Production of medical devices in the prefecture for 2014 was worth 130.3 billion yen, taking the No. 3 spot across the country. The prefectural government is looking to raise the figure to 175 billion yen by 2020.

As Japan's population is shrinking, medical equipment makers in Fukushima Prefecture apparently need to market their products not only to the domestic market but to foreign markets, so that the prefecture can win first place in clinical equipment production.

Evacuees : End of free housing soon?

December 3, 2016

Fukushima's voluntary evacuees

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2016/12/03/editorials/fukushimas-voluntary-evacuees/#.WEQ6W32Dmos>

A citizens' group supporting the people in Fukushima Prefecture who have fled from their homes in the wake of the March 2011 nuclear disaster has submitted a petition to the Diet with nearly 200,000 signatures asking for the continuation of public housing assistance for the evacuees. The prefectural government announced last year that it plans at the end of next March to terminate the assistance for people who voluntarily left their homes. However, most such evacuees have yet to find new residences. Halting the housing assistance will place a heavy financial burden on low-income evacuees. Fears also persist over the radioactive contamination in the areas where they lived before the nuclear crisis. Not only the prefecture but the national government, which pays for a large portion of the assistance, should rethink the decision.

As of July, some 89,000 Fukushima people continued to live away from their homes — 48,000 inside the prefecture and 41,000 elsewhere in Japan — after they fled from the dangers posed by the triple meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power's Fukushima No. 1 power plant. Some evacuees followed the government's designation of their hometowns as no-go zones due to the high levels of fallout, while others left their homes on their own out of fear of radiation exposure, particularly for their children, and other reasons even though they lived outside the designated evacuation zones.

The Fukushima Prefectural Government has since been providing housing assistance to the nuclear refugees regardless of whether they stayed within the prefecture — and regardless of whether they were forced out by government order or fled by choice — to cover their rent, including for public housing units owned by local governments. Fukushima has offered the aid by annually renewing the application of the Disaster Relief Law, under which a prefectural government carries out relief measures to residents in the event of a disaster — including supply of food, water, clothing and medical services as well as emergency repairs to damaged homes — with a large portion of the cost coming from national coffers. The national government has shouldered most of the expense of the housing assistance regarding Fukushima. The prefectural government announced in June last year that it would end the assistance for voluntary evacuees at the end of next March. Gov. Masao Uchibori said the termination is aimed at prompting the evacuees to return to their original homes and at helping promote their sense of self-reliance. He explained that living conditions in the prefecture have improved with the development of public infrastructure and progress in the cleanup of radiation-contaminated soil.

According to a prefectural report based on a survey conducted in January and February, the decision will halt housing assistance for 12,436 households. Of the 3,614 households that voluntarily evacuated but remained in the prefecture, 56 percent have not yet found a place where they can live once the assistance is halted. The corresponding figure for the 3,453 such households living outside the prefecture is much higher — nearly 78 percent. The prefecture should pay serious attention to these findings. Some families may not be able to find and pay for a new home, although the prefecture reportedly plans to offer small subsidies for low-income and single-mother households after the large-scale assistance is ended.

The voluntary evacuees are confronted with various difficulties, both financial and psychological. The amount of compensation they received from Tepco is much smaller than that paid out to evacuees from the no-go zones. They also do not receive the monthly damages of some ¥100,000 that Tepco doles out to cover the mental suffering of those from the designated evacuation zones. Many of them face hardships ranging from the loss of their former jobs to separation from family members, long-distance commuting and divorces of couples due to differences over evacuating. The loss of housing assistance will likely result in even more hardships, both financial and emotional.

Many of the voluntary evacuees remain reluctant to go back to their hometowns for a variety of reasons, including the persistent fear of radiation, the desolate conditions of their original homes, and anticipated low levels of medical and other services in their former communities. The national government says it is safe for evacuees to return if the annual cumulative dose in the area is 20 millisieverts (mSv) or less, but that level is much higher than the legal limit of 1 mSv allowed for people in ordinary circumstances. In Ukraine, hit by the 1986 Chernobyl catastrophe, people are required to migrate if the annual cumulative dose in their area is 5 mSv or more and have “the right to evacuate” if the rate is between 1 mSv and 5 mSv. The national government and Fukushima Prefecture need to address why many of the volunteer evacuees are reluctant to return.

The national government may want to highlight the reconstruction in areas devastated by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami as well as the Fukushima nuclear disaster when Tokyo hosts the 2020 Summer Olympic Games. However, this should not result in the premature termination of vital relief measures for the affected people or untimely lifting of the designation of danger zones hit by the nuclear crisis. The government, which has sought to reactivate the nation’s nuclear power plants idled since the 2011 disaster, should understand why the evacuees felt they had to flee from their homes in the first place. It should not give up its duty of adequately helping the disaster victims.

December 3, 2016

Fukushima’s voluntary evacuees

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2016/12/03/editorials/fukushimas-voluntary-evacuees/#.WELz2n2Dmos>

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December 1, 2016

12,000 evacuee households from Fukushima fret over benefit loss

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201612010006.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Anxiety is spreading among many of the 12,000 or so households evacuated after the Fukushima nuclear disaster five years ago as their free housing benefits will end next March.

In late October, about 180 people, who have been receiving free housing after leaving their homes in Fukushima Prefecture, delivered a 200,000-signature petition to politicians in Tokyo asking for the accommodation allowance to be extended.

At the Upper House Members' Office Building, they voiced their concerns, one after another.

"We are being told to get out of our house," one of them said. "We are in a real fix."

The central government and Fukushima prefectural authorities have been providing prefabricated temporary housing units or paying the rent of those who have evacuated either within or to outside the prefecture, even if they did not come from designated evacuation zones.

The measures were introduced because many residents living outside evacuation zones left their homes out of anxiety over the spread of radioactive fallout.

A total of 231.6 billion yen (\$2.9 billion) had been spent by March 2016 on 44,000 households, including the cost of building prefab temporary housing units.

But the Fukushima prefectural government decided in June 2015 to discontinue the assistance for evacuees from areas outside evacuation zones.

"With cleanup efforts moving ahead, the living environments are getting better," Fukushima Governor Masao Uchibori said at the time.

The decision will affect the so-called voluntary evacuees, who lived in areas that were never designated evacuation zones, and evacuees from areas where evacuation orders were lifted in 2014.

Briefing sessions have been held by the prefectural government since December 2015 at about 40 locations within and outside the prefecture to explain details of rent subsidy measures for low-income households, which will replace the free housing benefits.

In late September, prefectural government officials faced a barrage of questions from about 70 residents of Kawauchi, Fukushima Prefecture, who packed a meeting hall in a temporary housing complex in Koriyama, also in the prefecture.

The village of Kawauchi had 2,739 residents as of Oct. 1 and at least 889 of them were living for free in rented housing, prefab temporary housing units and elsewhere outside the village.

Fumio Sakuma, 67, is one of them. His wife, who has a kidney disease, takes a 40-minute drive to hospital three times a week to undergo dialysis. Sakuma said he is anxious about having to relocate with his sick wife.

"We would feel grateful if we were allowed to stay here for one or two more years," he said at the meeting. Municipalities in disaster areas in Fukushima Prefecture, in the meantime, are hoping that the end of the free housing benefits will see a return of residents.

“Assistance measures by the central and prefectural governments cannot continue forever,” said Yuko Endo, mayor of Kawauchi. “We might as well take a step forward to rebuild our livelihoods.” The town of Naraha, also in Fukushima Prefecture, has seen less than 10 percent of its residents return. “More than five and a half years have passed since the onset of the nuclear disaster,” said Naraha Mayor Yukiei Matsumoto. “It’s time for every one of us to think about standing on our own two feet.” (This article was written by Mikio Kano, Kenji Izawa and Akifumi Nagahashi.)

Bullying of Fukushima children: How many cases?

December 2, 2016

Teacher ‘insulted’ Fukushima boy in latest school bullying case

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201612020060.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

NIIGATA--In the latest classroom bullying case involving children from Fukushima, a fourth-grader has not attended school for more than a week due to the alleged victimization by a teacher as well as his classmates.

The municipal board of education here is investigating the harassment of the boy who had the derogatory term “germ” added to his name by his classmates, which was then apparently emulated by his teacher. The boy has been absent from his elementary school since his homeroom teacher, who is in his 40s, is alleged to have used the insult on the boy. The teacher has denied the accusation, but other pupils have corroborated the boy's account.

The school's principal has admitted that the teacher's behavior was problematic.

The principal also said in an interview with The Asahi Shimbun on Dec. 2 that the school will provide an opportunity for the teacher to apologize directly to the student and his parents.

The case is **the latest to have surfaced of the potentially widespread bullying at their new schools of Fukushima students who fled the 2011 nuclear disaster.**

Last month, media reports on a 13-year-old junior high school boy who moved to Yokohama recounted his experiences at his elementary school through his handwritten notes, sparking huge repercussions across the country.

In Tokyo, another Fukushima boy attending junior high school described his ordeal at his elementary school in an interview with The Asahi Shimbun later that month.

The two boys were called “germ” by their classmates, who also harassed them in other ways.

But in the Niigata case, the teacher called the boy by the insulting name in front of other students when he handed his pupil a correspondence notebook on Nov. 22, according to the boy's mother.

The boy appeared to be devastated by the teacher's behavior, which compounded the anxiety he already felt when his family was unable to contact his father to make sure he was safe after a powerful quake jolted Fukushima Prefecture earlier that day. His father works in the prefecture.

The following day was a national holiday and the school was closed. The boy has not attended the school since Nov. 24.

The boy's family moved to Niigata over concerns about radiation in 2011 following the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March that year.

According to his mother, some of his classmates began ostracizing him and calling him “germ” when he was in the third grade.

When he entered the fourth grade, some children threw away his stationery and broke his umbrella, and the harassment later escalated.

Although his mother was worried about him, he reassured her, saying, “I have friends who are trying to protect me. I will be OK.”

But he became visibly depressed when he learned of the report about the bullying the boy in Yokohama went through, according to his mother.

“My son must have thought that he is also the victim of severe harassment,” his mother said.

Urged on by his mother, he told his homeroom teacher on Nov. 17 that he, too, was being called “germ” by other children.

Five days later, however, he found that his teacher had joined in the name-calling.

His mother contacted the school to raise the issue. The teacher initially denied the allegation when school officials inquired.

“I have never said such a thing, given that the boy came to me for counseling,” the teacher was quoted by one of the officials as saying.

But the teacher was found to have actually used the insult when other teachers interviewed all the students in the boy’s class on Nov. 29. Some students admitted that they called the boys by an unkind name and that the teacher, too, had done the same.

According to the principal, the homeroom teacher said he wanted to apologize for being insensitive.

(This article was written by Atsushi Nagata and Kohei Kano.)

Niigata elementary school teacher calls Fukushima evacuee a ‘germ’

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/12/02/national/social-issues/niigata-elementary-school-teacher-calls-fukushima-evacuee-germ/#.WEE4nH2Dmos>

Kyodo

NIIGATA – An student who fled the Fukushima nuclear crisis in March 2011 has been absent from school for more than a week since a teacher added “germ” to his name when addressing him in late November, a local education board in Niigata Prefecture said Friday.

The fourth-grade elementary school student in the city of Niigata told the teacher, in his 40s, before the summer holidays that he was upset because other pupils were teasing him by adding “germ” to his name. According to the board of education, the teacher then did the same thing while addressing the boy in class on Nov. 22, just five days after the boy spoke with the teacher again about issue.

Nov. 22 was also the same day a strong earthquake struck off Fukushima in the early morning, reminding many of the March 2011 mega-quake and tsunami that triggered the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

On Nov. 24, the boy’s parents complained to the school, and other teachers interviewed every student in the class five days later.

“Despite being approached by the pupil for help, the teacher said something extremely inconsiderate and inappropriate,” a board of education official said.

The case follows an earlier report of bullying in Yokohama, where a 13-year-old evacuee from Fukushima was verbally and physically attacked. The elementary school and local education board failed to offer meaningful support in that case, a third-party panel found.

When is "trouble" likely to turn into disaster?

December 2, 2016

NRA aims to delay evacuation of vulnerable people in cases of nuke plant power failure

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161202/p2a/00m/0na/014000c>

The Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) plans to delay the evacuation process for vulnerable people in the case of nuclear plant power failure and other potentially dangerous incidents.

- 【Fukushima & Nuclear Power】

This stance has been adopted **in response to the fact that power failures and other problems do not necessarily result in disaster**, and that some people become unwell or suffer from worsened medical symptoms during evacuation.

However, there are also some concerns regarding delayed evacuation -- which has prompted the NRA to consider listening to the opinions of electric power companies.

Specifically, under review is the evacuation process in response to an "Article 10 Alert" made by electric power companies to the government and local authorities based on the Act on Special Measures Concerning Nuclear Emergency Preparedness.

Under current regulations, if the alternating-current power at a nuclear plant is completely lost for more than 30 minutes, or the emergency core cooling system is activated following a coolant leak, vulnerable individuals such as the elderly and those with disabilities, who are within 5 kilometers of the nuclear plant, must be evacuated immediately.

The NRA is considering delaying the evacuation process until the trouble becomes likely to develop into a more serious situation.

At an NRA meeting on Nov. 30, one commissioner said, "We must discuss the risks of evacuation seriously."

Still checking radiation in fish

December 6, 2016

Radiation in fish off Fukushima tests below detectable level

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201612060039.html>

FUKUSHIMA--Radiation in all seafood caught off Fukushima Prefecture tested below the detectable level in November for the first time since the 2011 nuclear disaster.

Species including bass, rockfish and stone flounder--sales of which were banned by the central government--were tested between Nov. 11 and Nov. 28, and the prefectural government said they all fell below the detection threshold, meaning radioactive cesium was not detected in any samples.

The main reason is that most fish species have undergone a generation change over the past five years with the contaminated marine life dying out, said officials at the prefectural government's fisheries experimental station.

In addition, the passage of time helped fish exude radioactive cesium from their bodies.

The prefectural government began the tests in April 2011 following the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant the previous month.

Forty thousand fish and shellfish samples have been checked from 186 species over the past five and a half years.

The initial tests found that more than 90 percent of the samples were contaminated with radioactive cesium above the central government's safety limit of 100 becquerels per kilogram.

The percentage of polluted fish and shellfish then declined annually.

The tests since April last year showed that the pollution in all samples was within the safety limit.

The monitoring covers seafood caught in 30 locations, in waters with a depth of 5 meters and at a distance of hundreds of meters from the shore, including the area in a 20-kilometer radius of the crippled plant.

December 5, 2016

Volunteer group continues checking fish off Fukushima as radiation levels drop

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161205/p2a/00m/0na/022000c>

IWAKI, Fukushima -- As radioactive cesium levels in fish caught off the Fukushima Prefecture coast show lower levels that fall within safety limits set by the government, the Mainichi Shimbun recently accompanied a volunteer group that continues to measure these fish on one of its outings.

- **【Fukushima & Nuclear Power】**

The group, called "Iwaki Kaiyo Shirabetai Umi Labo" (Iwaki marine investigative squad ocean lab), began its activities three years ago. Rather than relying on the national government, Fukushima nuclear plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. or others for data on radioactive pollution in the ocean off Fukushima Prefecture, the group aims to obtain this information itself and share it across the country.

On Nov. 13, a Mainichi Shimbun reporter boarded one of the group's fishing ships, which set out from Hisanohama Port in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture. Two kilometers from the disaster-stricken plant, the group pulled up a large, 90-centimeter, 7.7-kilogram olive flounder. This fish was caught by Eriko Kawanishi, a civil servant who came from Tokyo to participate in the outing and said it was her first time ever to hold a fishing rod. A 90-centimeter fish would be a rare catch even for a veteran fisherman.

The olive flounder was refrigerated and taken back to veterinarian Seiichi Tomihara at the Aquamarine Fukushima aquarium in Iwaki for dissection. Based on the growth rings on its "otoliths," a structure located near the brain, Tomihara estimated the fish's age at 11 years. He said there is research estimating the life expectancy of olive flounders at around 12 years, adding, "This looks like one of the oldest (one can find)."

A 1-kilogram slice of the fish put in a detector showed 14.6 becquerels of radioactive cesium -- below the 100 becquerels-per-kilogram national safety limit for regular food products. Lately the research group has found no fish, including bottom-dwelling fish like olive flounder, that exceed this limit. In addition, radiation checks done by the prefectural government find hardly any cases of fish that top the safety limit. Riken Komatsu, 37, joint-representative for the group, says, "This is the first time for us to check such an old olive flounder, and I thought there would be dozens of becquerels detected. The result was lower than I had imagined and I feel relieved."

Fish that were already adult at the time of the disaster, with a slowed metabolism and a narrow range of habitat, tend to show high radiation levels, Komatsu says. With time having passed since the disaster, the generational replacement of the fish in the area has moved forward. The group says the highest radiation level it has detected so far was 138 becquerels from a 56-centimeter olive flounder in July 2014.

Olive flounder caught off of Iwaki are known as "Joban-mono" and have a good reputation. There is hope among locals that the fish will regain their pre-disaster popularity.

Komatsu says, "The prefectural government and fishing cooperatives are also releasing radiation readings from fish taken off Fukushima Prefecture, but I feel there are few taken from waters near the nuclear plant. Stronger data showing the fish's safety (like data from fish near the plant) should raise the value of Fukushima olive flounder."

Bullying linked to Fukushima

December 5, 2016

Mom of student called 'germ' at school links bullying to Fukushima disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161205/p2a/00m/0na/020000c>

The mother of a fourth-year elementary school student in Niigata, who has been staying home from school since late November after being called "germ" by his peers and his teacher, spoke to the Mainichi Shimbun, saying that her son was bullied because he came from nuclear disaster-hit Fukushima Prefecture.

- **【Related】** Schoolteacher calls Fukushima evacuee pupil 'germ'
- **【Fukushima & Nuclear Power】**

The family evacuated from Fukushima after the nuclear disaster. While the Niigata Municipal Board of Education has denied a link between the bullying of the student and his Fukushima roots, according to the mother, the student started being called "germ" around March of this year, which marked five years since the disaster, and this is one reason she argues that there is a connection.

According to the mother, around March 11 of this year when the nuclear disaster issue came up in class, her son proactively talked about his own experiences.

"He must have been happy to be able to give lots of answers," she says. However, it was around that time that he started being called "germ" by his classmates.

"Some kids who knew he had come from Fukushima started calling him germ, and that led to kids who didn't know him also calling him that, like a nickname," she says.

In June, the student talked to his teacher, complaining that he was "being treated like a germ." At that point the student is thought to have not considered the name as bullying, and when the teacher referred to him as "germ" after summer vacation ended, he didn't appear to be deeply bothered by it.

In early November, though, it was reported in the news that a junior high school student in Yokohama who had evacuated from Fukushima Prefecture was bullied by being called "germ." When the student in Niigata heard this, he said, "It's the same as me," and the mother says she thinks "he probably began to see himself as being bullied." On the mother's advice, the student talked to his teacher about it again on Nov. 17. When he came home, he triumphantly said with a smile that he had talked to the teacher.

After a strong earthquake off the Fukushima Prefecture coast early on the morning of Nov. 22 this year, the boy went off to school looking anxious, he and his mother having not yet been able to get in contact with the father, who works in Fukushima Prefecture. During recess that day, while the student was receiving teacher-parent correspondence from his teacher, the teacher called him "germ" again. The shocked student returned home, and since Nov. 24 has been staying home from school, saying, "I want to go to school, but I can't because that teacher is there."

According to the mother, at first school authorities denied the teacher had called the student "germ." On Nov. 25 the father called the school and said tearfully that "There are kids who commit suicide (when they are bullied)." Although the teacher apologized, the mother says that the teacher treated them coldly, saying it was only this year that they had become the student's homeroom teacher. The teacher has said they want to apologize to the student, but the student is refusing to see the instructor and the school principal has been visiting the family's home every day to try and deal with the matter.

The family has been planning to move after the free rent for the government-leased apartment they are living in ends at the end of this fiscal year. The mother says, "My son had been asking that we stay in the same school district, but now that this has happened, we have no choice but to have him change schools," adding, "We evacuated voluntarily (from Fukushima), and I don't want to impose on the people of Niigata."

According to the Niigata Municipal Board of Education, there are 291 children who have evacuated from Fukushima Prefecture to the city of Niigata. It holds that "there is no bullying of students related to their Fukushima roots."

Timeline of events involving the bullying of the student:

2011:

March -- The Great East Japan Earthquake and the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster occur. The student evacuates to the city of Niigata.

2016:

Around March -- Student begins to be ostracized by peers and called "germ."

April -- Student enters fourth grade and homeroom teacher changes.

June -- Student speaks to teacher about being called "germ." Teacher disciplines classmates who bullied student.

Early November -- News is reported of a junior high school student in Yokohama who evacuated from Fukushima Prefecture and was bullied, including being called "germ."

Nov. 17 -- Student again speaks to teacher about being bullied.

Nov. 22 -- During recess, student is called "germ" by teacher in classroom in front of classmates.

Nov. 24 -- Student begins to stay home from school (Nov. 23 was a school holiday).

Nov. 29 -- School questions students about incident. Multiple students testify that teacher called student "germ," and teacher also says it is true.

(Based on sources including student's parents and the Niigata Municipal Board of Education)

A piece of living history



Smashed cars are piled on the roof of the outside corridor at Miyagi Kesennuma Koyo High School in Kesennuma, Miyagi Prefecture. (Tatsuya Sasaki)



December 5, 2016

Miyagi school ravaged in 2011 tsunami opens to public for 1st time

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201612050080.html>

KESENNUMA, Miyagi Prefecture--As a piece of living history, a school engulfed in the 2011 tsunami here opened to the public for the first time, offering a stark lesson to its destructive force.

Vehicles swept in the 14-meter waves, spawned by the Great East Japan Earthquake, remain on the grounds of Miyagi Kesennuma Koyo High School, 500 meters inland.

Plates of metal, wooden scraps, tires, cabinets and other debris are scattered all around so that just walking through a building was difficult.

"I thought I had known what the disaster was like from media reports, but seeing a car sitting on the third floor taught me how powerful the tsunami was," said Satoshi Tanaka, a Kanagawa prefectural government official who has been dispatched to the Kesennuma civil engineering office.

Tanaka, 41, was one of 135 visitors from within and outside the prefecture who were allowed in to the former buildings at the school on Dec. 3.

The weekend session was the last opportunity to see the structures firsthand before maintenance and clean-up work begins.

The four-story south building, which was directly hit by the tsunami, will open as a disaster monument in fiscal 2018. All other damaged facilities will be demolished.

The south building was made of reinforced concrete, but the southwestern corner of its top floor was broken away when a seafood processing plant carried off in the tsunami crashed into it.

A car that smashed through the window in a classroom had come to rest upside down on the third floor of the south building.

On the stairs, what was frozen fish had drifted to a stop where it dried into a black blob. The handrails that remained were twisted into one, bent or entangled with each other.

The floors were full of debris including toppled chairs and glass shards. Steel frames and electrical cords hung from the ceilings.

About five cars were piled up on the roof of the outside corridor connecting the north building and a facility for vocational training.

No one was killed in the disaster.

Before the tsunami struck, all 170 students were evacuated to outside the school grounds. In addition, 51 other individuals, including teachers, school staff and local residents, were unharmed after they fled to the fourth floor of the north building.

(This article was written by Tatsuya Sasaki and Norihiko Kuwabara.)

Cleanup bill to double original estimate

December 9, 2016

Fukushima nuclear disaster bill to double to 21.5 trillion yen

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201612090075.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Total costs to resolve the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster will reach 21.5 trillion yen (about \$188 billion), nearly double the previous estimate, which will be passed on to users in higher electricity bills. The industry ministry said on Dec. 9 that the final tab for the accident at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant is estimated to balloon from the 11 trillion yen calculated in 2013.

To prevent the plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co., from going bankrupt under the skyrocketing costs for decommissioning, compensation and decontamination, the government said it will increase the maximum amount of its zero-interest loans to the utility from the current 9 trillion yen to 13.5 trillion yen. Much of the additional costs will be eventually covered by the public, as the government plans to raise electricity charges to that end.

Within the total, compensation paid to people affected by the nuclear accident will increase from 5.4 trillion yen to 7.9 trillion yen. Bills for decontaminating areas polluted with radioactive substances will rise from 2.5 trillion yen to 4 trillion yen.

The rise in compensation costs is mainly attributable to a new support measure adopted for people in the agricultural and forestry sectors who cannot restart their work due to restrictions on the shipments of their products.

The increase in decontamination costs was mainly led by the rise in prices of bags to hold contaminated materials and the larger-than-expected personnel costs of decontamination workers.

The compensation costs will be temporarily covered by the government. But TEPCO will eventually shoulder most of the burden, in principle, spending many years paying it off.

Other major utilities and newly established electric power companies will also contribute in the form of a rise in electric power cable usage fees.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry also unveiled plans to increase TEPCO's revenues to decrease the burden on the public.

The plan calls for TEPCO to increase its annual profits from the current 400 billion yen to 500 billion yen by cutting costs in the field of electricity transmission and distribution. It also expects an additional 100 billion yen through restarting the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata Prefecture.

Fukushima cleanup to cost 21.5 trillion yen, double original estimate

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161209/p2a/00m/0na/009000c>

The cost of dealing with the aftermath of the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant will reach 21.5 trillion yen, roughly double the government's initial prediction of 11 trillion yen, preliminary calculations released on Dec. 8 by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry have shown.

- **【Related】** Fukushima plant decommissioning, compensation costs to almost double: gov't est.
- **【Related】** Fukushima nuclear plant decommissioning cost to surge

The government plans to have new electricity suppliers and major utilities including the plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), tack a portion of the additional costs onto power bills.

The ministry calculated that the cost of compensating people affected by the disaster would rise from 5.4 trillion yen to 7.9 trillion yen. The cost associated with decontamination and the construction of interim storage facilities for radioactive waste, meanwhile, was expected to rise from 3.6 trillion yen to 5.6 trillion

yen. The ministry estimated that TEPCO would end up paying around 8 trillion yen to decommission the plant's reactors, up from an initial estimate of 2 trillion yen.

TEPCO and other major power companies are covering the cost of compensation payments but the ministry plans to make new power producers and suppliers also pay some compensation. A ministry representative explained, "Customers of power producers and suppliers that have newly entered the market used power from major utilities in the past, and benefitted from nuclear power plants."

Over a 40-year period beginning in 2020, new power producers and suppliers are set to add part of the additional costs of compensation payments to "wheeling charges" that they pay to use the lines of major power suppliers such as TEPCO, which will be passed onto power bills. However, new power producers and consumer groups say this runs counter to the aims of liberalization of the power market, which aims to stimulate the market with the entry of newcomers.

The ministry hopes to quieten resistance from market newcomers by having major utilities furnish them with relatively cheap power through the market, including nuclear and hydro power. Major utilities, however, are unhappy with this approach.

The cost of decommissioning the reactors at the Fukushima plant will be left in TEPCO's hands. A system will be created to have the Nuclear Damage Compensation and Decommissioning Facilitation Corp. collect profits that TEPCO acquires through streamlining of its management, which will be paid out under government supervision.

At this stage, however, the method of decommissioning the reactors at TEPCO's Fukushima No. 1 plant has yet to be established.

"It is difficult to accurately calculate at this stage how much it will cost to decommission the reactors," a ministry representative commented. There are accordingly fears that the decommissioning cost could rise in the future.

The government plans to extend the amount of compensation bonds loaned to TEPCO from the current 9 trillion yen to 14 trillion yen. It is possible that this could lead to an increased burden on the public in the future.

Panel says Fukushima power plant's cleanup fees are now almost double the 2013 estimate

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/12/09/national/panel-says-fukushima-power-plants-cleanup-fees-now-almost-double-2013-estimate/#.WEqgtH2Dmos>

Kyodo

The combined cleanup costs for the 2011 nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 plant have nearly doubled the figure estimated in 2013, reaching ¥21.5 trillion, a government panel said Friday.

The panel said it appears inevitable that Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc. will have to ask customers to shoulder part of the costs, including compensation for affected people, outlays for decommissioning, and cleanup of areas contaminated with radioactive substances released from the plant. To help the company secure money to cover ballooning expenses, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry said it is planning to raise the maximum amount of government bond issuance for the utility to ¥13.5 trillion from the current ¥9 trillion.

The panel raised its estimate for decommissioning fees to ¥8 trillion from the previous ¥2 trillion, for compensation to ¥7.9 trillion from ¥5.4 trillion and for decontamination costs to ¥4 trillion from ¥2.5 trillion. It also increased fees related to temporary storage facilities for soil contaminated with radioactive substances and other waste to ¥1.6 trillion from ¥1.1 trillion.

Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Hiroshige Seko said at a news conference, "The costs could increase depending on the situation but could also drop in line with technological innovations in decommissioning work."

The panel suggested that operations related to the Fukushima plant effectively stay under state control before reviewing the status in 2019.

The panel meeting, which began in early October, has also agreed on the need to seek cooperation from other power companies in reactivating Tepco's Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant in Niigata Prefecture, the world's largest nuclear plant by generation capacity, which will be a main source of its revenue.

Reviving Fukushima

December 10, 2016

Cabinet to approve Fukushima restoration plan

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161210_23/

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has visited Fukushima Prefecture to inspect the progress of restoration following the 2011 nuclear accident.

Abe visited a machinery parts manufacturer in Minamisoma City on Saturday.

The government and Fukushima Prefecture have been working to create a cluster of robotics' companies in the city.

The president of the manufacturer told the prime minister that he hopes the robotics industry will help revitalize the local economy.

Abe responded that the state-of-the-art robot testing facilities that had been built in the city should attract companies from around the world, and that he wants the region to develop around them.

Abe later visited the town of Kawamata, where an evacuation order is expected to be lifted next March.

He ate fermented natto soybeans manufactured in the town using local products.

Abe told reporters after the inspection that his government intends to help people from areas where the evacuation order will be lifted with housing and rebuilding their lives.

He also said **his cabinet will approve a plan before the end of the month to accelerate Fukushima's restoration. He said it includes partial governmental funding for decontamination in non-entry zones.**
See also : <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/videos/20161208112102585/>
Sending in the robot (video)

And who is going to pay?

December 10, 2016

2.4 trillion yen in Fukushima crisis compensation costs to be tacked onto power bills

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161210/p2a/00m/0na/002000c>

The Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry plans to require power companies including new market entrants to tack approximately 2.4 trillion yen in compensation costs for those affected by the Fukushima nuclear crisis onto power bills.

- **【Related】** Fukushima cleanup to cost 21.5 trillion yen, double original estimate

The plan would result in an 18-yen average increase in monthly household electricity bills, ministry officials said. This policy is part of a draft proposal that the ministry unveiled at a Dec. 9 expert panel meeting to discuss how to share the ongoing cost of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster that broke out in March 2011.

At the meeting, the ministry also revealed that the estimated cost of dealing with the disaster has hit 21.5 trillion yen -- nearly double the initial projection of 11 trillion yen.

Total compensation for people affected by the disaster is estimated to rise from 5.4 trillion yen to 7.9 trillion yen, and decontamination-associated costs are likely to grow from 2.5 trillion yen to 4 trillion yen. The bill for building interim storage facilities for radioactive materials is expected to rise from 1.1 trillion yen to 1.6 trillion yen, while that of decommissioning reactors at the crippled plant will likely surge from 2 trillion yen to 8 trillion yen.

The draft proposal points out that nuclear power plant operators' financial reserves to deal with potential nuclear accidents are 2.4 trillion yen short -- almost equal to the projected increase in Fukushima disaster compensation costs.

The draft proposal urges not only major utilities including Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), operator of the Fukushima power station, but also new market entrants to shoulder the cost. Over a 40-year period from 2020, new companies would be required to add part of their share of compensation payments to "wheeling charges" that they pay to use the transmission lines of major utilities. **All these costs would be passed onto the consumer.**

An increase in the cost of decontamination would be covered by proceeds from the sale of TEPCO shares held by the government, and an increase in interim storage facility costs would be financed with additional taxpayers' money, while that in decommissioning costs would be shouldered by TEPCO. The draft proposal would also require new power companies to foot part of the cost of decommissioning nuclear plants if major utilities decide to scrap the power stations earlier than initially planned.

New bullying case

December 13, 2016

New Fukushima evacuee bullying case emerges at Tokyo school

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201612130064.html>

By MIKI AOKI/ Staff Writer

Garbage taken home by a bullied student in Tokyo's Chiyoda Ward (Provided by the student's mother. Part of the photo is blurred.)

After school bullying cases emerged recently in cities including Yokohama and Niigata, another student who was evacuated from Fukushima Prefecture after the 2011 nuclear disaster has come forward. The latest case, at a junior high school in the capital's Chiyoda Ward, involved the victimized student being intimidated into paying for three other students' sweets, juices and other goods, worth about 10,000 yen (\$87).

The case came to light after the student and the student's mother reported the bullying to the school.

"It is regrettable that bullying existed at this school. I will do my utmost to prevent it from happening again," said the principal of the Chiyoda Ward government-run school.

The victim told The Asahi Shimbun that some students had begun to utter the taunt "hinansha" (evacuee) around summer 2015.

This year, the name-calling escalated, and the bullies started making insulting and threatening remarks such as, "You don't have money as you came from Fukushima," "Can't you pay the bills for us as you are poor?" and "I will reveal that you are an evacuee."

The bullies then manipulated the victim into paying for their doughnuts, juices and other goods.

The picked-on student was also pressured by the student's tormenters to take home their trash, which they did by putting it into the student's school bag.

At school, the student's textbooks and notebooks went missing. Some of them were found in a corner of the classroom with ripped pages.

"Since my elementary school days, I have been bullied on the grounds that I am an evacuee. I was not able to tell that to anybody. It was painful. I thought that if I can silence other students with money, I will do it," the student said.

In late November, the student's mother noticed all the garbage in her child's school bag. Finally the student told the mother what had been happening, and then reported the case to the school, along with the mother.

The school investigated 15 pupils but was not able to confirm that the victim has been bullied on the grounds that the student was an evacuee from Fukushima Prefecture.

However, three of those investigated admitted that the student had paid their bills. The school confirmed that the bills totaled about 10,000 yen.

The school said that it did not investigate the missing books, as it was not clear when they had disappeared.

"I had thought that the school would investigate who dumped them," the mother said of the missing books, adding, "I want the school to deal with the case by paying more consideration to the bullied student."

Compensation costs

December 13, 2016

Nuke crisis compensation costs tacked onto power bills to face 4 tril. yen cap

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161213/p2a/00m/0na/012000c>

The Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry is set to limit the amount of additional costs of compensating those affected by the Fukushima nuclear crisis, tacked onto "wheeling charges" that power companies pay to use power lines, to 2.4 trillion yen, sources close to the ministry said.

- **【Related】** 2.4 trillion yen in Fukushima crisis compensation costs to be tacked onto power bills
- **【Related】** Fukushima cleanup to cost 21.5 trillion yen, double original estimate

The amount would eventually be added to power charges that consumers pay. Moreover, the ministry admitted that the total amount to deal with the aftermath of the nuclear disaster, which it estimates at 21.5 trillion yen, will certainly increase further.

The ministry made the disclosure at a meeting of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) panel on the issue on Dec. 12 in response to concerns expressed by LDP legislators that the cost of dealing with the crisis could rise.

The estimated total amount of compensation for the Fukushima crisis, which had been estimated at approximately 5.4 trillion yen in 2013, has grown to about 7.9 trillion yen.

Following the outbreak of the nuclear crisis, a system has been established under which Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, and other major power companies contribute funds for compensation payments in proportion to the outputs of their nuclear plants.

In order to secure funds to cover an increase in the total compensation cost from 5.4 trillion yen, the ministry has proposed to a panel of experts on decommissioning of the Fukushima plant and compensation payments that the additional cost be added to wheeling charges. Not only major power companies but new market entrants would be required to foot the bill, which would eventually be added to power charges paid by consumers.

The ministry explains that it aims to require market newcomers to foot part of the compensation cost in order to "prevent consumers who have benefited from nuclear power by major power companies from switching to new power companies to avoid footing the compensation cost."

However, some experts have pointed out that such a move would run counter to the liberalization of the power market designed to spur new market entries.

Moreover, since the industry ministry is authorized to set the amount of wheeling charges at its own discretion without going through Diet deliberations, some members of the experts' panel and the LDP have voiced concerns that the amount of compensation costs passed onto consumers could unlimitedly snowball.

In response to such concerns, the ministry is considering obligating power companies to clearly show the amount of compensation cost each consumer is required to shoulder in detailed statements on power charges. Moreover, if the amount of compensation were to increase further, the ministry would consider other measures to cover the additional cost, which could also increase the burden on consumers.

The industry ministry has also disclosed that the estimated cost of dealing with the accident, which it released on Dec. 9, does not include the expense of creating hubs for reconstructing affected areas where residents are unlikely to be able to return in the foreseeable future and that of disposing waste to be generated when fuel debris is removed from the crippled reactors. Therefore, the estimated total cost of dealing with the aftermath of the disaster, which has almost doubled from 11 trillion yen as of 2013 to 21.5 trillion yen, will certainly increase further.

Bullying case not an exception

December 16, 2016

Fukushima evacuee poll finds kids in eight Yokohama-area households had experienced bullying

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/12/16/national/social-issues/fukushima-evacuee-poll-finds-kids-eight-yokohama-area-households-experienced-bullying/#.WFRKS32DILM>

Kyodo

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– Eight households that evacuated from Fukushima following the 2011 nuclear disaster said their children have experienced bullying at their new schools, according to a survey of 61 families suing the government and the nuclear plant operator.

Of the 61 households, 30 have children in elementary or junior high school, and eight said their children had been verbally abused or even physically assaulted at schools in and around Yokohama, according to sources involved with the lawsuit.

One of the sources quoted a plaintiff as saying that person was “unaware of a causal relationship between evacuation and bullying.” But the source also noted there may also be more bullying because some children don’t want to talk about being bullied.

“In reality, it seems there are more cases,” the sources said in a statement.

Lawyers conducted the survey after it was revealed last month that a 13-year-old in Yokohama was bullied by classmates after evacuating from Fukushima, and called “germ” and extorted for money while at elementary school.

That bullying case drew public attention, prompting the Yokohama Board of Education to investigate.

Among the children of the eight households citing bullying in the survey, a male student was told such things as “Keep away from us!” and “Fukushima people are idiots,” while attending a junior high school in Kawasaki, the sources said.

The survey did not count as bullying cases in which parents said their children did not get accustomed to their new schools or could not make friends, the sources said.

In the lawsuit filed with the Yokohama District Court, 174 plaintiffs from 61 households are demanding ¥4.07 billion (\$34.4 million) from the government and the Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc., the operator of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant where three reactors melted down after a massive earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

30 billion yen of public funds to decontaminate "difficult to return" areas

December 20, 2016

Government to help fund Fukushima decontamination, easing Tepco's burden

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/12/20/national/government-help-fund-fukushima-decontamination-easing-tepcos-burden/#.WFkrdn2Dmic>

Kyodo

The Cabinet decided Tuesday that the central government will help pay to decontaminate areas worst hit by the 2011 Fukushima reactor meltdowns, marking a shift from earlier rules requiring Tepco to foot the bill.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's team endorsed a plan to set up a reconstruction hub in the most contaminated, off-limits areas in Fukushima Prefecture and secure about ¥30 billion for decontamination work in the fiscal 2017 budget.

The cost of the work could total around ¥300 billion in the next five years and grow further depending on how it progresses.

The plan is in line with proposals made in August by the ruling coalition, but no government panel review or Diet deliberations have been held on it, raising the prospect that it could be criticized as a bailout for Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc.

The government decided to add the decontamination work, including soil and tree removal, to infrastructure projects for making the affected land habitable again, but the special law on decontamination states that Tepco should shoulder the expenses.

The government will have to revise the special law on rebuilding Fukushima to accommodate the shift.

The move to help pay for the decontamination came after the expected price tag surged to ¥4 trillion from the previous estimate of ¥2.5 trillion, which did not include the cost of cleaning the areas with the highest levels of radiation.

If the government-funded cleaning area expands, the use of taxpayer money is likely to balloon to several trillion yen.

Meanwhile, in an effort to turn Tepco's business fortunes around, the government proposed that the battered utility work together with other companies in operating nuclear power plants and distributing power.

A panel of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry urged the company to launch talks with other power companies next year and set up a joint venture in the early 2020s to eventually consolidate their businesses.

"Tepco reform will be the basis of reconstruction in Fukushima and could lead to a new, stronger utilities industry," said industry minister Hiroshige Seko.

"We will profoundly accept the proposal and drastically carry out reform," said Tepco President Naomi Hirose.

December 19, 2016

Public funds earmarked to decontaminate Fukushima's 'difficult-to-return' zone

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161219/p2a/00m/0na/015000c>

The government is set to inject some 30 billion yen in public funds into work to decontaminate so-called "difficult-to-return" areas whose annual radiation levels topped 50 millisieverts in 2012 due to the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster, it has been learned.

- **【Related】** News Navigator: How far has decontamination progressed in Fukushima?
- **【Related】** Temporary radioactive soil storage sites hinder Fukushima farmers

While the government had maintained that it would demand plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) cover the decontamination expenses based on the polluter-pays principle, the new plan effectively relieves TEPCO from the hefty financial burden by having taxpayers shoulder the costs. The new plan is part of the government's basic guidelines for "reconstruction bases" to be set up in each municipality within the difficult-to-return zone in Fukushima Prefecture from fiscal 2017, with the aim of prioritizing decontamination work and infrastructure restoration there. The government is seeking to lift evacuation orders for the difficult-to-return zone in five years.

However, the details of the reconstruction bases, such as their size and locations, have yet to be determined due to ongoing discussions between local municipalities and the Reconstruction Agency and other relevant bodies.

The government is set to obtain Cabinet approval for the basic guidelines on Dec. 20 before submitting a bill to revise the Act on Special Measures for the Reconstruction and Revitalization of Fukushima to the regular Diet session next year. The 30 billion yen in funds for the decontamination work will be set aside in the fiscal 2017 budget.

In the basic guidelines, the government states that decontamination work at the reconstruction bases is part of state projects to accelerate Fukushima's recovery and that the costs for the work will be covered by public funds **without demanding TEPCO to make compensation**. The statement is also apparently aimed at **demonstrating the government's active commitment to Fukushima's restoration**.

Under the previous guidelines for Fukushima's recovery approved by the Cabinet in December 2013, the government had stated that it would demand TEPCO cover the decontamination expenses of both completed and planned work. However, it hadn't been decided who would shoulder the decontamination costs for the difficult-to-return zone as there was no such plan at that point.

Masafumi Yokemoto, professor at Osaka City University who is versed in environmental policy, criticized the government's move, saying, **"If the government is to shoulder the cost that ought to be covered by TEPCO, the government must first accept its own responsibility for the nuclear disaster, change its policy and investigate the disaster before doing so. Otherwise, (spending taxpayers' money on decontamination work) can't be justified."**

Statement issued on evacuee "harassment and insensitivity"

December 23, 2016

Fukushima plaintiffs speak up on evacuee plight

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161222_31/

A group of people who evacuated due to the 2011 accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant has spoken out about the many problems they face, including recent bullying of evacuee children.

The group consists of plaintiffs in lawsuits demanding compensation for damages from the central government and Tokyo Electric Power Company, which operates the plant.

Group representatives called for understanding of their suffering in a statement released at a news conference in Tokyo on Thursday.

The plaintiffs living in and outside Fukushima Prefecture, where the plant is located, took the action after a revelation last month that a student evacuee was bullied at school in Yokohama, near Tokyo.

The bullies demanded money from the boy. Similar cases have since been revealed elsewhere.

The statement says it is regrettable that evacuees, who are victims of the accident, suffer from insensitive criticism and unreasonable acts by others. It says the group seeks understanding of the seriousness of the situation.

A senior official of the group, Mitsuo Sato, said **what has been reported about bullying is the tip of the iceberg**. He said adults also face harassment and insensitivity. Sato said he wants people to know that bullying and discrimination affect all evacuees.

A woman who voluntarily evacuated from Fukushima Prefecture with her daughter asked people to think about why they had to leave their home. She added that the nuclear accident is far from over.

State funds will be used to clean up Fukushima

December 22, 2016

State funds to be used for clean-up in Fukushima

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161222_21/

The Japanese government, for the first time, is using state funds for decontamination work in areas affected by the 2011 nuclear accident in Fukushima Prefecture.

The environment ministry earmarked roughly 30 billion yen, or about 250 million dollars, in the fiscal 2017 budget plan, which was approved by the Cabinet on Thursday.

The allocation will be for cleaning up no-entry areas where radiation levels remain prohibitively high.

The government has so far made the plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company, pay for the cleanup, based on the principle that the entity responsible for the contamination should bear the cost.

Some lawmakers within the governing coalition are opposed to the turnaround in policy, saying the government should continue to make TEPCO pay.

Environment minister Koichi Yamamoto told reporters on Thursday that the ministry will carefully explain the decision in an effort to seek public understanding on the use of state funds.

The Environment Ministry says it estimates the cost of decontamination work carried out by TEPCO so far at around 36 billion dollars.

But the cleanup of the heavily-contaminated areas that starts from fiscal 2017 is expected to be more time- and labor-consuming than the work in lesser tainted areas.

Taiwan protests lifting of ban on Japanese food

December 26, 2016

Protesters in Taiwan demonstrate against lifting of Japanese food import ban

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161226/p2a/00m/0na/004000c>

TAIPEI -- A demonstration against the easing of import regulations on Japanese food was held here on Dec. 25, in a show of lingering concerns over the effects of the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

- **【Related】** Taiwan to ease food import ban on Japan except Fukushima
- **【Related】** Volunteer group continues checking fish off Fukushima as radiation levels drop
- **【Related】** 5 years after Fukushima meltdowns, wild game animals still show cesium contamination

The protest -- which according to organizers consisted of approximately 15,000 people largely related to the opposition Nationalist Party -- was a demonstration against the Taiwanese authorities' decision earlier this year to lift a ban on Japanese food imports from Ibaraki, Tochigi and Gunma prefectures -- which all neighbor Fukushima Prefecture -- as well as Chiba Prefecture.

Prior to the protest, a hearing on the easing of regulations was due to take place in New Taipei City on Dec. 25, but civilized discussion became impossible once the angered visitors became disorderly and started jostling with the police.

The food import ban -- which the ruling Democratic Progressive Party decided to lift after having taken office in May 2016 -- was imposed by Taiwan's previous president, Ma Ying-jeou, following the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster in 2011. The ban applied to Japanese food imported from five Japanese prefectures -- namely Fukushima, Ibaraki, Tochigi, Gunma, and Chiba.

However, following the new government's decision to lift the ban on food from four of the five banned prefectures, there has been a backlash within Taiwan, predominantly from the Nationalist Party and environmental groups. Protesters have stated that, "Taiwan is importing polluted 'nuclear disaster food' from Japan that even Japanese people do not eat."

Although the lifting of the import ban involves food that circulates in Japanese markets, the escalation of the issue in the public domain is fuelling Taiwanese consumers' anxiety concerning Japanese food overall.

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