

Japan : To restart or not to restart N-plants

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Deception

Utility planted 'citizens' to support restart of reactors

FUKUOKA – About 50 Kyushu Electric Power Co. employees and affiliates were involved in attempting to orchestrate an email campaign, posing as ordinary citizens, in support of the restart of its nuclear reactors on a government-sponsored TV program, according to an internal investigation by the utility.

The staged emails account for about a fifth of all supportive opinions received in the program aired in late June, according to sources informed about the investigation. The number of those involved may increase as the investigation is still ongoing.

At a special committee on nuclear safety of the Kagoshima Prefectural Assembly Monday, Akira Nakamura, at the time head of the utility's nuclear power control department, said he was told by a supervisor to enliven discussions on the program, aimed at winning support for restarting two reactors at the Genkai nuclear power plant in Saga Prefecture.

Both Kagoshima and Saga are served by Kyushu Electric.

He thus instructed a subordinate to make the program known among other employees and affiliates. But while Nakamura neglected to follow up on the matter, the subordinate went ahead and asked others to post the comments.

The subordinate sent emails to three Kyushu Electric offices and four subsidiaries, according to the utility.

Sources at Kyushu Electric said the supervisor involved was then Executive Vice President Mamoru Dangami, who retired from the post in late June.

In his first appearance in front of reporters since the scandal broke, Dangami admitted to having issued the instruction to let employees know about the program. « Responsibility rests with me, » he said.

Nakamura had denied the existence of the emails when questioned by the committee on July 4, just two days before Kyushu Electric acknowledged the shenanigans in public. He told the assembly

Monday he had not been aware of the issue back then.

The emails, revealed by an in-house whistle-blower, dealt a fresh blow to the credibility of the nuclear industry as it struggles with the crisis at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 plant.

Kyodo, July 12, 2011

<http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20110712a3.html>

Utility execs said behind talk-up

Two now-former Kyushu Electric Power Co. executives, including an executive vice president, were involved in a ploy to have employees solicit supportive public comments during a June 26 industry ministry-sponsored event pushing for the restart of two of the utility's reactors, company sources said Friday.

The revelation indicates executives of the utility may have been behind the bogus public support display.

Kyushu Electric has admitted an employee sent emails late last month to other employees and subsidiaries, asking them to post comments supporting the restart of the reactors for the event, sponsored by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, held to win over locals and broadcast live on cable TV and the Internet.

According to the sources, the executive vice president and other executives at that time asked a senior manager in charge of nuclear plants to send emails to let people know about the cable TV program. After being asked by the executives, the senior manager ordered a male employee to send emails to subsidiaries, the sources said.

On Friday, METI Minister Banri Kaieda urged visiting Kyushu Electric President Toshio Manabe to restore public trust.

Manabe told reporters after the meeting in Tokyo that his resignation is not necessarily the only option for taking responsibility for the matter, and that continuing to work to restore the company's trust is « one way » of taking the blame.

But he reiterated that he cannot decide on his own whether to resign and must consult with the utility's chairman, Shingo Matsuo, and others.

Matsuo on Friday returned to Japan from abroad earlier than scheduled, apparently to discuss the matter with Manabe.

Prior to the talks with Kaieda, Manabe visited senior vice industry minister Tadahiro Matsushita and apologized for the scandal.

The incident came to light at a sensitive time when the industry ministry was struggling to pave the way for the restart of two reactors at the Genkai plant in Saga Prefecture that have been shut down for regular checks.

Matsushita told Manabe he is « extremely angry » about the incident and said, « I personally suspect

that this case may have been conducted systematically. »

Kyodo, July 8, 2011

<http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20110708x2.html>

Worker exposed deception / Whistleblower informed JCP of Kyushu Electric's plans

FUKUOKA—An employee of a Kyushu Electric Power Co. subsidiary blew the whistle on a recent deception in which the utility ordered employees of its offices and subsidiaries to send e-mails supporting the restart of two nuclear reactors to a meeting for local residents, the Japanese Communist Party said.

According to the JCP Fukuoka Prefectural Committee, the male employee visited a JCP office in the prefecture on June 25, the day before the explanatory meeting took place. He is quoted as saying his company instructed him to pretend to be a local resident and send an e-mail in favor of restarting the reactors. The employee submitted to the JCP office a document sent by his company asking employees to send e-mails.

The whistleblower talked about the matter with a friend, who then introduced him to the JCP office, after telling himself that such an action went against compliance and would not do his company any good.

The JCP later relayed the matter to assembly members of Saga and Kagoshima prefectures, which host Kyushu Electric's nuclear power plants. Based on information provided by the employee, Akira Kasai, a House of Representatives member of the JCP, posed questions regarding the allegations during an intensive deliberation of the lower house Budget Committee on Wednesday.

The Yomiuri Shimbun , July 9, 2011

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T110708005861.htm>

Kyushu Electric executive's order behind nuke plant restart email scandal

One order from a Kyushu Electric Power Co. executive apparently led to a flood of comments to a TV program from employees of the utility and its subsidiaries in favor of restarting nuclear reactors — a flood that has led to accusations Kyushu Electric is attempting to manipulate public opinion.

The Kyushu Electric operating officer apparently ordered a section chief to notify the company's nuclear power-related sections and connected subsidiaries that a local cable TV station would air a program on the reactivation of two nuclear reactors at the Genkai Nuclear Power Plant in Saga Prefecture. The section chief then sent emails to those sections and subsidiaries urging them to send comments to the program supportive of restarting the reactors.

Kyushu Electric began questioning the section chief on July 7, and company President Toshio Manabe — under pressure to step down over the e-mail scandal — asked him about his motives and about who received his e-mails, the Mainichi has learned.

The revelation comes as Genkai Mayor Hideo Kishimoto has rescinded his approval for the reactivation of the nuclear power station following the central government's decision to conduct stress tests on the reactors.

A local cable television station aired the program on the Genkai power plant on June 26, in which the TV station solicited comments from viewers.

According to sources familiar with the case, the operating officer instructed staff to notify three nuclear power-related sections, including those in charge of the Genkai power plant and the Sendai Nuclear Power Plant in Kagoshima Prefecture, as well as four subsidiaries of the upcoming TV program.

In response to the order, the section chief is believed to have sent e-mails asking them to post comments in favor of the resumption of the reactors.

In his e-mails, the employee said, « It is a matter of extremely serious concern and it is important for us to deal with it at any cost, » asking the recipients to send out opinions and questions to help gain support for restarting the reactors among prefectural residents.

Kyushu Electric plans to investigate if other officers and employees were involved in the case, the sources said.

Manabe directly interviewed the section chief for about 20 minutes on the morning of July 7. The employee was understood to have admitted involvement, but a Kyushu Electric spokesman declined to confirm or deny the content of the interview.

Mainichi Shimbun , July 8, 2011

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/07/08/20110708p2a00m0na011000c.html>

Stress tests

Japan's idled nuclear reactors need to pass new safety assessment

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Japan's nuclear power reactors must undergo additional safety assessments dubbed « stress tests, » and those now idled for regular checkups must pass the first stage of the reviews in order to restart, the government said Monday.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano said at a news conference the tests will be carried out in two stages, taking into account standards proposed by the European Union in the wake of the crisis triggered at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant by the massive earthquake and tsunami in March.

Edano said the Nuclear Safety Commission of Japan will play a major role in conducting the tests. As the commission is « an independent » body, unlike the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, the government cannot say when the screenings will begin and finish, he said.

The decision is almost certain to ensure that none of the 35 idled nuclear reactors will resume operating this month and there will likely be a great impact on Japan's power supply crunch this

summer.

Amid deep-seated public concerns about the safety of nuclear facilities, the tests are aimed at insuring that 54 Japanese nuclear reactors are capable of withstanding the kind of catastrophic earthquake and tsunami that ravaged the country's northeast on March 11.

The safety agency, under the wing of the industry ministry, had already said these reactors have been proven to be safe following inspections after the Fukushima crisis. But not everyone is convinced by the agency's claims partly because it is part of the ministry, which has promoted the use of nuclear energy over the years.

Under the new framework, the agency will still be in charge of designing the scope of safety tests. But the safety commission, which until now was not involved in the process of determining the restart of an idled reactor, will be tasked with giving the final go-ahead, after utilities receive checks on the results of their inspections from the agency.

The safety agency is expected to outline the new format for safety tests in the coming days, government officials said.

The first review will analyze to what extent nuclear plants ready to be restarted can tolerate the damage that could be incurred under such extraordinary circumstances.

The second stage of the tests will be more comprehensive and carried out on all nuclear plants. Depending on the results, Japanese nuclear reactors that are now in operation could be suspended.

The announcement from Edano came after Prime Minister Naoto Kan added to public confusion about Japan's nuclear policy by abruptly ordering last week the carrying out of additional safety tests akin to Europe's.

Kan is widely expected to resign this summer, and Edano, the top government spokesman, said the specifics of the tests will « basically » remain even if the government changes.

Edano also said that Kan hopes to hold a news conference this week to explain his government's additional efforts to insure nuclear safety.

Prior to the order, the government had said it was safe to restart reactors offline for routine maintenance, citing reviews conducted by the nuclear safety agency.

Kan, Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Banri Kaieda and other Cabinet members had been inconsistent about conditions for their restarts, leading local leaders in Saga Prefecture to retract or put off decisions to approve the rebooting of two reactors at the Genkai nuclear power plant.

The Genkai reactors were to have been the first to be reactivated since the magnitude-9.0 quake and tsunami triggered the crisis at the Fukushima plant.

By summer next year, all 19 of the nuclear reactors operating now will go offline for regular checkups.

In Japan, nuclear reactors must in principle be shut down for inspection after every 13 months in service and their operators need to obtain consent from local governments to restart them, although that is not required under the law.

The need for « stress tests » was touched on in late June during a ministerial meeting of the

International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna, which was convened in the wake of the Fukushima crisis.

Kyodo, July 11, 2011

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20110711p2g00m0dm011000c.html>

Doubts emerge over gov't plan to assess safety of nuclear power plants in two stages

The government's plan to assess the safety of nuclear power plants in two stages based on the results of its so-called stress tests on them is difficult to understand in the eyes of members of the general public.

Under the plan, the government will conduct the first-stage assessment of nuclear reactors that are undergoing regular inspections and the second-stage assessment of reactors in operation.

Stress tests are conducted on nuclear reactors to see how far they can withstand disasters and accidents beyond the scope of assumption made when they were designed — like the massive tsunami triggered by the March 11 Great East Japan Earthquake. Therefore, the same safety standards should basically apply to both reactors undergoing regular inspections and those in operation.

There had been differences within the government over whether the safety assessment should be made a precondition for restarting nuclear reactors. The government's coordinated view on the issue it has just announced appears to be just a compromise plan that takes into consideration conflicting opinions. Therefore, it could give the public the impression that the government will conduct the first-stage assessment in order to ensure operations at nuclear reactors suspended for regular inspections will be resumed.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano has argued that the first-stage assessment will never be simpler than the second-stage assessment, but he is required to provide a more specific explanation to avoid inviting mistrust from the public.

According to the government's plan, the Nuclear Safety Commission of Japan (NSC) will examine the appropriateness of the selection of check items and the results of the assessment carried out by the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA).

The public's confidence in NISA, which belongs to the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry, has been badly damaged following the crisis at the tsunami-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. Under the circumstances, an independent organization should thoroughly evaluate the assessment that NISA will conduct on nuclear reactors, and the NSC is supposed to play an important role to that end.

However, considering that the public's confidence in the NSC has also been shaken, the government should study the possibility of giving the commission more independence and authority.

The results of stress tests conducted by the European Union are supposed to be cross-checked by experts in other countries. Japan should also consider having a team of experts including those from overseas examine the NISA assessment results.

It is worrisome that there is a perception gap between top government officials and the NSC over the role that the commission should play in evaluating the NISA assessment. While top government officials are eager to have NSC proactively involved in the evaluation process, the NSC intends to only confirm the appropriateness of the method that the NISA will employ in assessing the safety of nuclear reactors and the assessment results.

The government should be responsible for deciding whether to allow operations at nuclear reactors, suspended for regular inspections, to be resumed. However, the NSC should be proactively involved in providing data and evaluating NISA's safety assessment, based on which the government will make such a decision.

A balance between electric power supply and demand is an important factor in considering whether the two-stage assessment is appropriate. However, there are differences in views on the matter, with some saying that power suppliers have sufficient capacity to generate electric power consumed in Japan and others expressing fears that if the current situation continues, it will adversely affect the domestic industry.

One cannot help but wonder whether electric power companies have enough capacity to generate electric power to fill demand this summer, for the forthcoming winter and for summer next year, and whether there are enough privately-owned electric power generators in Japan to make up for the expected shortage of power. The government and relevant organizations should clearly show the current capacity of power supply in Japan depending on various conditions.

Mainichi Shimbun Editorial, July 12, 2011

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/perspectives/news/20110712p2a00m0na006000c.html>

Okada says Japan's reactor 'stress tests' should be shorter than EU's

OFUNATO - Democratic Party of Japan Secretary General Katsuya Okada indicated Sunday that Japan's safety assessment to be conducted on nuclear reactors before restarting them following suspension for regular checks should be shorter than the European Union's version of "stress tests" on which it will be based. »A long-term test similar to the European Union's would have an impact on industries and people's daily lives," Okada told reporters while on a visit to Ofunato, Iwate Prefecture. "The point is how to create Japan's version of the test."

Although Okada had been reluctant to make the stress tests a precondition for resuming operations of reactors suspended for regular maintenance, he said, "We have come to a point where we cannot gain people's understanding under current standards. We have no choice but to take the path of restarting them after they clear the stress tests."

According to an outline of the government's unified view on the resumption of the reactors, the state will conduct the stress tests in two stages - first checking the damage tolerance of the reactors and then conducting a comprehensive safety assessment based on the European

Union's stress tests.

Whether operation of a reactor can be resumed will be determined during the first stage, and the second stage, involving the detailed EU method, will be conducted to enhance the reliability of the safety checks, government sources have said.

In the wake of the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima Daichi nuclear power plant in northeastern Japan triggered by the March earthquake and tsunami, the European Union has been conducting stress tests since June to see how reactors would respond supposing they lost all power as a result of disasters such as earthquakes and floods.

It is expected to take about three-and-a-half months to prepare an interim report and seven months for the final report.

Kyodo, July 11, 2011

<http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20110711a4.html>

State of N-plants

Ratio of operating nuke reactors stands at 36.8% in June

TOKYO (Kyodo) — The ratio of Japan's 54 commercial nuclear reactors operating came to 36.8 percent in June in the wake of the earthquake, tsunami and ensuing nuclear disaster in March, according to the Japan Atomic Industrial Forum.

As of the end of June, 35 reactors, including those at the crippled Fukushima Daiichi plant, were suspended, bringing the rate down to the lowest level since May 1979, when the figure dropped to 34.2 percent, as reactors across Japan were suspended following the nuclear crisis at Three Mile Island in the United States.

The suspension of the No. 3 reactor at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Mihama power plant since May 15 for a regular checkup also contributed to push down the rate, the forum said.

The rate stood at 58.3 percent in March, 50.9 percent in April and 40.9 percent in May, according to the forum.

The ratio is expected to remain low for the time being in the face of possible delays in restarting those reactors suspended for regular checkups, after the government suddenly ordered additional safety assessments called "stress tests."

The government had said earlier that sufficient steps had been taken to

restart and safely operate two nuclear reactors suspended for checks at the Genkai power plant in Saga Prefecture.

But on Wednesday, it said additional safety assessments would be conducted at all nuclear power plants in Japan to check the reactors' capacity to withstand extreme natural events, causing prefectural and local government leaders to retract or put off their decisions to approve rebooting the two Genkai reactors in the near future.

According to the government's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, the operation ratio of commercial reactors stood at 67.3 percent in fiscal 2010 through March and 65.7 percent in the previous year. The rate is expected to drop significantly in fiscal 2011 through March 2012.

Kyodo, July 9, 2011

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/07/09/20110709p2g00m0dm014000c.html>

Genkai mayor withdraws OK for two reactors' restart

Genkai Mayor Hideo Kishimoto on Thursday officially retracted his controversial decision to approve the rebooting of two reactors at the Genkai nuclear plant and slammed the central government for ordering « stress tests » out of the blue following weeks of assurances about reactor safety.

The retraction, a political rather than legal necessity for doing the stress tests, creates an awkward situation for Kishimoto, who gave the go-ahead for restarting the reactors just Monday, leaving the final decision to Saga Gov. Yasushi Furukawa.

« Anger welled up in my heart after hearing Prime Minister Kan say that resumption will be based on the stress tests. It sounded like my decision was a waste, » Kishimoto said Thursday morning. « I would like to declare the withdrawal at the (town) assembly. »

Kishimoto was not alone in his frustration.

When Saga Gov. Yasushi Furukawa met with Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano in Tokyo the same morning, he complained about the flip-flop over nuclear safety standards and questioned the timing of the government's decision.

« I do respect the government's decision to hold stress tests to ensure further confidence, but I cannot help but ask 'Why now ?' » Furukawa said to Edano.

Kishimoto, « who is generally a mild-tempered man, is extremely angry. . . . He said he does not know who to trust anymore, » Furukawa added.

The stress tests are to be conducted on all nuclear plants, but the sudden change in policy has exposed the government's wavering confidence in atomic energy amid the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl in 1986.

Exacerbating the situation is already high public distrust of the central government, Tokyo Electric

Power Co. and Japan's entire nuclear regulatory regime.

Kishimoto was the first mayor since the nuclear crisis began in Fukushima Prefecture to permit the restart of a reactor.

His decision followed a high-profile meeting with industry minister Banri Kaieda, who claimed the safety of the two reactors in question had been confirmed.

But two days later, Kaieda, under orders from Prime Minister Naoto Kan, turned his world upside-down by announcing stress tests for all reactors nationwide to « offer a sense of assurance. »

Furukawa accused Kan and Kaieda of not being on the same page regarding nuclear energy policy.

« I think that there is a difference in the prime minister's and minister Kaieda's perception of nuclear policy, including the issue of resumption, » Furukawa said.

« Without a concrete government approach, there is nothing we can do. »

Edano apologized at the meeting and promised to coordinate government policy.

In the Upper House Budget Committee, Kaieda said he might resign to take responsibility for the confusion, although he did not specifically say when.

« I will take responsibility when the time comes, » he said in response to an opposition lawmaker's demand that he step down.

At a later news conference, Edano stressed the need not only to reconfirm the safety of the plants, but also to make sure that the people feel assured about the results.

« The state has firmly confirmed the safety of the Genkai plant . . . (but) we are making efforts and being creative to reassure the people that it is safe, » Edano said.

« Once everything has been organized, we would like to inform you about the details as clearly as possible. »

By MASAMI ITO, *Japan Times* Staff writer, July 8, 2011
<http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20110708a1.html>

Shikoku Electric to put off resumption of nuclear reactor

TAKAMATSU (Kyodo) — Shikoku Electric Power Co. said Friday it will not resume the operation of one of its three nuclear reactors in Ehime Prefecture, which has been suspended for regular checkups and was scheduled to be restarted Sunday, because it has not been able to gain approval from local authorities.

Ehime Gov. Tokihiro Nakamura separately reiterated that the prefectural government cannot give the go-ahead unless the conditions it has put forth are met, saying the plan to restart the reactor Sunday is « Shikoku Electric's schedule » and does not reflect the view of the local government.

Earlier this week, Nakamura said the conditions are the central government's presentation of safety

standards, sufficient safety-enhancing measures by Shikoku Electric and local communities' consent to the plan.

The No. 3 reactor of the Ikata nuclear power plant in the western part of Shikoku Island in southwestern Japan has been going through regular checkups since April 29.

The scope of inspections was broadened after the magnitude-9.0 earthquake and tsunami ravaged Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima Daiichi power plant in March, but Shikoku Electric was planning to restart the reactor Sunday and resume commercial operations on Aug. 9 after further checks.

The utility serving Shikoku Island will cease its emergency supply of 100,000 to 200,000 kilowatts of power for TEPCO as of Saturday, and secure enough power to meet demand during the summer peak by taking measures such as purchasing electricity from the corporate sector.

It does not plan to seek cooperation in energy-saving efforts.

Kyodo, July 8, 2011

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/07/08/20110708p2g00m0dm145000c.html>

Host City to Delay Decision on Sendai N-Reactor Restart

Satsumasendai, Kagoshima Pref., July 8 (Jiji Press)—Satsumasendai Mayor Hideo Iwakiri said Friday the southwestern Japan city will delay a decision on whether to allow Kyushu Electric Power Co. <9508> to restart a suspended reactor at its Sendai nuclear plant.

Speaking to reporters, Iwakiri said that he had wished to make a decision on whether to permit the resumption of the plant's No. 1 reactor before a municipal assembly session starts in September.

But making a decision by that time now seems difficult because of the central government's plans to conduct stress tests on all nuclear plants in Japan and the revelation of Kyushu Electric's improper attempt to bolster pro-nuclear plant opinions at a government-hosted event.

Iwakiri also said that he is confused because members of Japan's cabinet have different views on the relations between the nuclear stress tests and the restart of halted reactors.

The Sendai nuclear power plant, located in Satsumasendai, Kagoshima Prefecture, has two reactors. The No. 1 reactor has been suspended for regular inspections.

Jiji Press, July 8, 2011

<http://jen.jiji.com/jc/eng?g=eco&k=2011070800514>
