

Thousands protest in Tokyo ahead of Fukushima anniversary

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TOKYO – Banging on drums and waving “Sayonara nukes” signs, thousands of people rallied in a Tokyo park and marched to Parliament Sunday to demand an end to nuclear power ahead of the third anniversary of the Fukushima disaster.

Participants at the demonstration, one of several planned across cities in Japan, said they would never forget the March 11, 2011, nuclear disaster, the worst since Chernobyl.

They also vowed to block a move by the government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to restart some of the 48 idled reactors and backpedal on the commitment by the previous government to aggressively reduce the nation’s reliance on nuclear power. Oil imports have soared since the disaster, hurting the economy.

Katsutoshi Sato, a retired railway worker at the rally, was holding a fishing pole with a picture of a fish dangling at the end to highlight his worries about radiation contaminating the rivers.

“The protests are growing,” he said, noting he was taking part in his third anti-nuclear demonstration. “All kinds of people are joining, including families with kids.”

Protests like Sunday’s have popped up across the nation over the last three years, as the usually docile and conformist Japanese begin to question the government’s assurances that nuclear power is safe.

The movement has also drawn celebrities like Ryuichi Sakamoto, who shared an Oscar for “The Last Emperor” score, and Nobel Prize-winning author Kenzaburo Oe.

The Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant, which exploded and underwent three core meltdowns, continues to spew radiation into the air and sea. Decommissioning is expected to take decades.

Robert Geller, a seismologist at the University of Tokyo, said it was troubling that after three years there is no full explanation on what went wrong at Fukushima, and how to avoid a recurrence.

YURI KAGEYAMA, Associated Press, Mar. 09, 2014

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