

Japan/Fukushima: Farmers herd in for protest

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Farmers herd in for protest

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More than 200 farmers, with two cows, converged Tuesday on Tokyo, where they shouted and punched the air in a protest to demand redress for products contaminated by radiation spewing from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The farmers from the disaster-hit Tohoku region wore green bandanas and held signs saying "Nuclear disaster is human disaster" and "Stop nuclear energy" outside the headquarters of Tokyo Electric Power Co.

Radiation leaking from Tepco's Fukushima No. 1 plant since it was crippled in the March 11 quake-tsunami disaster has been found in milk, water and leafy vegetables such as spinach from around the plant.

"I could not sit still in Fukushima. I want Tepco to understand our frustration, anxiety and worries over our future," said 72-year-old Katsuo Okazaki, who grows peaches and apples. "My patience has run out. The nuclear crisis is totally destroying our farming business."

The utility says it will take six to nine months to bring the plant into cold shutdown, a crucial step for allowing the roughly 80,000 people evacuated from a 20-km radius of the plant to return home.

Tepco started depositing initial compensation payments of ¥1 million per household Tuesday into bank accounts of people forced to evacuate due to leaking radiation, trade minister Banri Kaieda said.

Okazaki isn't eligible because his farm is 60 km from the plant, but he still wants compensation because he fears consumers will shun produce from his region over the long term. He said vegetable growers already have lost a great deal of money because of the nuclear accident. "I am constantly worried about this, and feel like my strength is being sapped away," he said.

Farmers took turns shouting their frustrations into a microphone, their words carried over a loudspeaker mounted atop a van, as lunch-hour passersby in the busy office district stopped and gawked at the animals.

"Tepco, give us back our cows and pigs and chickens," one farmer shouted.

With its liability likely to stretch into the trillions, Tepco announced Monday it would slash executive compensation by 50 percent, cut managers' salaries by 25 percent and low-level employees would get a 20 percent pay cut.

Meanwhile marking the 25th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear accident, 87 Japanese antinuclear

groups issued a joint statement criticizing Tepco's failure to prepare adequately for a large tsunami as "immoral and criminal."

P.S.

* From the Japan Times, Wednesday, April 27, 2011:
<http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20110427a2.html>