

Japan N-industry international and national policies

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Japan N-industry international markets

Japan nuclear pacts with 4 countries in limbo over Fukushima crisis, political turmoil

Japan's ambitious strategy to sell nuclear plants overseas is in jeopardy as the ruling Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) has not been able to secure parliamentary endorsement for nuclear pacts with four nations due to the ongoing crisis at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant and deepening domestic political turmoil.

Japan's nuclear pacts with Jordan, Russia, South Korea and Vietnam have been submitted to the Diet for approval. The credibility of Japan's nuclear safety, however, has been crumbling since the Fukushima nuclear crisis, casting a pall on the nation's strategy to sell atomic power plants abroad.

After losing out to South Korea on a multi-billion dollar atomic power contract with the United Arab Emirates in late 2009, the DPJ-led government worked out a new growth strategy in June 2010 to promote foreign sales of nuclear plants. Japan then struck nuclear pacts with Jordan in September 2010 and with South Korea in December, respectively. Japan signed a similar pact with Russia in May 2009 during the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the New Komeito-led administration. The present government had planned to secure Diet approval and put the pacts into effect.

The government tried desperately to secure Diet endorsement for the nuclear treaty with Jordan in particular because the deadline for bidding was set for late June. Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd. planned to form a joint venture with France's Areva SA to take part in the nuclear project. But because the severity rating of the nuclear crisis at the damaged Fukushima No. 1 plant was raised to seven in April, the lower house panel on foreign affairs put off deliberation on the pact. The panel has not been convened since May 25 due to the parliamentary gridlock caused by political wrangling between the ruling and opposition parties.

Jordanian Planning and International Cooperation Minister Jafar Hassan visited Japan on June 9 and delivered a reassuring message, saying his nation still had high regard for Japanese technology. Russia and Canada, however, were also bidding on the project. A senior Ministry of Economy, Industry and Trade official expressed his worry, saying, "The fact that it remains unclear when the treaty will be endorsed by the Diet is a negative factor for the evaluation of our bid."

Although the government and the ruling parties have started to re-examine the country's nuclear policy since the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear crisis, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano simply said at a news conference on June 29, "The status of nuclear plant (exports) will be determined in the process of reviewing energy policies in light of the nuclear accident."

There are lawmakers within the DPJ who are cautious about Japan's exports of nuclear plant technology, saying, "Japan, which has now had a nuclear accident itself, is not in a position to sell nuclear power plants."

Mainichi Shimbun , July 2, 2011

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/07/02/20110702p2a00m0na014000c.html>

Toshiba lobbying U.S. to build nuclear waste repository in Mongolia

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Toshiba Corp. has lobbied a senior U.S. government official to realize an international nuclear fuel supply scheme that includes the construction of a nuclear waste repository in Mongolia, according to a copy of a letter by Toshiba's president obtained by Kyodo News on Friday.

Norio Sasaki, president of the Japanese electronics giant which has U.S. Westinghouse Electric Co. as a subsidiary, sent the letter dated May 12, 2011, to Deputy Secretary of Energy Daniel Poneman.

The governments of Japan, the United States and Mongolia have already been discussing the scheme, called Comprehensive Fuel Supply, informally, according to an internal Japanese government document dated February 2011, obtained by Kyodo News.

The basic idea of the scheme is to supply countries wishing to introduce nuclear energy with reactors made by U.S., Japanese and other major companies that would use nuclear fuel produced in Mongolia, with the spent fuel returned to the country.

Mongolia is known to hold huge reserves of uranium.

Sasaki said in the letter, "As anti-CFS opposition can be anticipated, it is essential for the Parties to the project to promote closer coordination in order to secure continued progress."

A Toshiba public relations official confirmed that Sasaki had sent the letter to Poneman, while U.S. governmental sources said that the letter was circulated within the administration of U.S. President Barack Obama.

Early in May, the major Japanese daily Mainichi Shimbun carried a story on the project focusing on the possible building of a nuclear waste repository in Mongolia.

"We must recognize that the CFS project has now been publicized around the world," Sasaki's letter said, referring to similar news stories in April in the United States and Mongolia.

"Toshiba finds value in CFS because it adds value to Mongolia's natural resources and will contribute to the country's economic growth, while the interim storage solution will bring greater meaning to an international nonproliferation regime," the letter said.

The Obama administration has pushed for an international nuclear supply system as part of his call for a world free of nuclear weapons. Uranium enrichment and the reprocessing of spent fuel can be directed to both military and civilian purposes.

Obama wants to tighten control of these technologies through international supply schemes such as the envisioned CFS because there would be no need for any country that introduces nuclear power generation to develop such technologies and produce its own fuel.

Since the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant triggered by the March 11 earthquake and tsunami, antinuclear sentiment has strengthened in Japan and other countries. Some European countries such as Germany and Italy have decided to forgo nuclear power in the future.

In the letter, however, Sasaki said that Japan and the United States should stay the course to promote the CFS even after the Fukushima crisis and "Toshiba's policy of active involvement in CFS remains unchanged."

In February, the Mongolian government sent a delegation to Tokyo for consultations on the CFS project, a Japanese senior official said on the condition of anonymity.

The official criticized Toshiba's lobbying activities, saying, "Even after such a terrible incident in Fukushima, those in the 'nuclear power' inner circle have no feelings of repentance at all." The official also said Sasaki's letter seems to reflect a sense of crisis in the nuclear power industry.

Another Japanese official expressed skepticism regarding the feasibility of the scheme. "How could such a project fly in the future? We have to negotiate with China and Russia if we want to transfer nuclear waste to Mongolia. With respect to transportation, these neighboring countries would have a veto."

There is also skepticism in academic circles in Japan, not only regarding the scheme's technical feasibility but Japan has its own nuclear recycling policy that excludes the option of disposing of spent nuclear fuel from other countries.

"Japan would not accept any spent fuel from any foreign country at the reprocessing plant in Rokkasho (Aomori Prefecture). On the other hand, could we thrust waste from overseas on Mongolia? It would be morally wrong," said Tadahiro Katsuta, associate professor at Meiji University who specializes in nuclear energy policy.

Kyodo, July 2, 2011

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20110702p2g00m0dm011000c.html>

Local: Saga, Tsuruga, Genkai, Hamaoka...

Saga town mayor approves restart of Genkai nuclear reactors

SAGA (Kyodo) — Hideo Kishimoto, mayor of Genkai, Saga Prefecture, approved Monday the resumption of two suspended reactors at the Genkai nuclear power plant.

The mayor's decision, conveyed to Kyushu Electric Power Co. President Toshio Manabe in a meeting,

makes Genkai the first municipality hosting a nuclear power plant to approve restarting reactors following regular inspections since the March earthquake-tsunami disaster and subsequent nuclear crisis.

Attention now turns to whether Saga Gov. Yasushi Furukawa will also agree to the resumption. Furukawa has said he will make a final decision in mid-July.

Following Kishimoto's decision, Furukawa told reporters, "If none of the municipalities hosting a nuclear plant (agrees to) restart reactors, all plants will be suspended. The prefectural assembly and prime minister's decisions are important (for his decision)."

Furukawa has already shown his intention to give approval during a meeting with Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Banri Kaieda in late June, but he wants to meet with Prime Minister Naoto Kan before he finalizes his decision.

Manabe indicated after the meeting with the mayor that Kyushu Electric will restart the reactors as soon as Furukawa gives approval and move on to commercial operations about two weeks after the resumption.

"The safety (of the reactors) has been secured by urgent safety measures (taken after the disaster). The town assembly also agreed to restart the reactors," said Kishimoto, telling Manabe to avoid human errors in plant operations by taking further safety steps.

"Stable supply of electricity is necessary for Japanese society. I hope (my decision will) have a positive effect on (resumption at) other plants," the mayor said.

Manabe said, "I really appreciate the town's decision."

The approval of local municipalities is not legally required to restart the reactors, but Kyushu Electric nevertheless sought the green light from Genkai.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano also welcomed the decision of the Genkai mayor.

"I take it positively as indicating a certain degree of support (for resumption)," Edano told a press conference, emphasizing that the government will continue to tell local municipalities and residents that the reactors are safe. But he did not make it clear whether Kan will meet with the Saga governor.

Meanwhile, a few members of an antinuclear group visited the Genkai town office to protest the mayor's decision. Tsuneyuki Taguchi, a 59-year-old farmer who lives 10 kilometers from the Genkai plant said, "The discussion (over resumption) is still underway in neighboring municipalities and I cannot accept Genkai's decision."

Manabe visited Karatsu, Saga Prefecture, and met with Deputy Mayor Masaaki Seto, informing him of the Genkai mayor's decision. Seto said, "At the moment, I am still cautious about resumption."

Two of the Genkai plant's four reactors, the Nos. 2 and 3 units, are currently shut down for regular checks. Their restart was postponed in the wake of the crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Kyodo, July 4, 2011

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20110704p2g00m0dm015000c.html>

Saga governor to make decision on restart of 2 reactors in mid-July

SAGA (Kyodo) — Saga Gov. Yasushi Furukawa said Friday he would make a decision in mid-July after talks with Prime Minister Naoto Kan on whether he would agree to the proposed restart of two reactors at the Genkai nuclear power plant operated by Fukuoka-based Kyushu Electric Power Co.

Furukawa, speaking at a prefectural assembly session on nuclear power safety, said “the prime minister’s visiting Saga Prefecture would be a key factor and I will make a decision after talks with the premier.”

Furukawa is expected to give the go-ahead for the restart of the two reactors after receiving briefings on the government’s future nuclear power policy from Kan who is eager to promote the use of renewable energy sources.

“Mid-July will be a milestone (in making a decision),” the governor said, taking into consideration the prefectural assembly’s schedule and next Friday’s briefing session for residents.

Furukawa said it would be best for Kan to visit Saga Prefecture for talks with him, but also indicated he might go to Tokyo.

Kan is considering how to respond to Furukawa’s request for a meeting, government sources said.

One government source said there are many reactors currently being shut down for regular checkups, adding it might be more reasonable to convene a meeting of heads of local governments hosting nuclear power plants and to brief them all at the same time.

Earlier in the day, independent Saga prefectural assembly member Yasushige Miyazaki took the floor at a session of the assembly’s committee on the safety of nuclear power and said it could not be denied that a crisis could occur at the Genkai plant in the town of Genkai, Saga Prefecture, southwestern Japan.

He also expressed doubts about the government’s Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency which argues that the crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant was triggered by the March 11 tsunami that followed the magnitude-9.0 earthquake.

Miyazaki urged the governor to seek more data from the central government to confirm that no serious damage was caused to the crippled Fukushima plant by the quake itself. But the governor rejected the request, saying the government has provided sufficient data.

Two of the Genkai plant’s four reactors, the No. 2 and No. 3 are currently shut down for regular checks. Their restart has been delayed due to the Fukushima crisis.

On Wednesday, Gov. Furukawa indicated he would support the restart of the two reactors, saying safety issues have been resolved. But many of the assembly’s 38 members are reluctant to have the reactors resume operation, saying local residents are concerned about their safety.

The other reactors of the Genkai power plant — the No. 1 and No. 4 units — are currently in operation.

Kyodo, July 2, 2011

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20110702p2g00m0dm009000c.html>

Tsuruga reactor not equipped with vent to relieve pressure

TOKYO (Kyodo) — The No. 1 reactor at the Tsuruga nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture is not equipped with a vent to discharge steam from the reactor container to relieve inside pressure in case of emergency, sources close to the matter said Sunday.

Among 30 boiling-water reactors in Japan, the Tsuruga reactor is the only one that lacks the system as its operator, Japan Atomic Power Co., believed it is less likely the container would be damaged due to pressure buildup, and thus setting up of the system had low priority.

However, the company decided to install the system during ongoing regular checkups as venting has been needed to put crippled reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant under control, according to the sources.

It has been estimated that the probability that pressure increase would damage the reactor is around 1 percent, but that at the No. 1 reactor at the Fukushima plant was also 1 percent, leading the company to install the system, according to the company.

The No. 1 reactor at the Tsuruga plant, the oldest reactor in Japan, started operations in 1970 and has been undergoing a 14-month inspection since January.

The company announced in 2002 that it would suspend operation of the reactor in 2010 and eventually decommission it, but it later decided to continue operations through 2016.

Kyodo, July 4, 2011

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20110704p2g00m0dm014000c.html>

Despite governor's support, resumption of Genkai nuke plant still uncertain

While Saga Gov. Yasushi Furukawa has expressed his intention to approve the resumption of operations at the Genkai Nuclear Power Plant upon a visit by Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Banri Kaieda, whether the plant will actually be restarted remains uncertain amid opposition from experts and local residents.

"The safety issues have been cleared," said Gov. Furukawa during a visit by Kaieda to the prefecture town of Genkai on June 29, indicating his intention to see the No. 2 and No. 3 reactors at Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Genkai Nuclear Power Plant restarted. The two reactors have been suspended due to regular inspections.

Kaieda's first visit to a municipality hosting a nuclear plant to seek approval for resuming operations came as Gov. Furukawa has shown the most tolerant attitude toward restarting atomic power plants among municipalities that host such facilities. Furukawa had told a prefectural assembly session,

"Apart from the request to suspend operations of Chubu Electric Power Co.'s Hamaoka Nuclear Power Plant, I can understand the central government's explanations to a certain degree."

The Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry hailed Furukawa's positive response upon Kaieda's visit on June 29, saying, "The minister's visit meant a great deal."

The central government is seeking to resume operations of nuclear reactors ahead of the peak power demand in summer. Many municipalities that are home to suspended nuclear reactors are apparently reluctant to become the first local government to approve the resumption of nuclear plant operations amid the harsh public sentiment in the wake of the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. Thus the central government is expecting that restarting the Genkai plant could bring about a pump-priming effect on other host municipalities, sparking the resumption of nuclear plant operations one after another.

However, experts have criticized the central government's move as "too premature," and the situation in Saga Prefecture still remains uncertain as Gov. Furukawa intends to make a final decision over whether to restart the Genkai plant after sounding out the prefectural assembly's intentions.

In a bid to appease local opposition, the central government broadcast programs to stress the "safety" of nuclear plants through a local cable television station and on the Internet on June 26. However, viewers fiercely criticized the programs, saying they were "too short" and "invited only a limited variety of guests."

Furthermore, it remains unclear whether the Genkai nuclear plant's resumption could prompt other municipalities to follow suit. "We've been doing everything we can to deal with safety issues. If we fail to gain understanding (from host municipalities), it would be difficult (to have many nuclear plants restarted)," said a senior official with the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA).

Local governments hosting nuclear plants have their own reasons to be hesitant about reopening such facilities.

Gov. Issei Nishikawa of Fukui Prefecture, which is home to the nation's largest number of commercial reactors at 13 with seven of them being suspended, said, "I won't approve the resumption of nuclear reactors unless the central government draws up new safety standards following the Fukushima accident." Nishikawa is also demanding the government devise safety measures for aging nuclear plants that have been in operation for 40 years or more.

But it will take time beyond this summer for the central government to respond to each request made by local governments due to technical and budgetary reasons.

Out of the 54 commercial reactors across the country, 37 have been suspended for regular inspections and other reasons. Since nuclear reactors are basically suspended for regular checks every 13 months, all the nation's reactors will have been suspended by next spring if none of the suspended reactors restart operations, posing a threat to power supply in the summer when the electricity demand for air conditioning surges.

"Even if we could tide over this summer through energy saving efforts, we might need to conduct rolling power outages next summer," said a senior official with the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy.

Mainichi Shimbun, June 30, 2011

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20110630p2a00m0na008000c.html>

Suit filed to seek decommissioning of Hamaoka reactors

SHIZUOKA (Kyodo) — A group of lawyers and residents of Shizuoka Prefecture filed a lawsuit Friday to seek decommissioning of the reactors at the Hamaoka nuclear power plant, arguing it cannot be made safe as it sits on a tectonic fault line and is at great risk of being hit by a major earthquake with an accompanying tsunami and ground liquefaction.

The plaintiffs include Hajime Mikami, mayor of Kosai, Shizuoka, and Tsuyoshi Yoshiwara, head of the Johnan Shinkin Bank, a Tokyo-based credit union.

Their complaint filed with the Shizuoka District Court said Chubu Electric Power Co. should decommission the Nos. 3 to 5 reactors, which have been suspended since May at the request of the government to preclude the kind of disaster that crippled the Fukushima Daiichi atomic power plant after the May 11 earthquake and tsunami.

The Nos. 1 and 2 reactors at the Hamaoka plant were deactivated in 2008 for decommissioning.

The plaintiffs also demanded the utility safely store spent fuel from the five reactors.

They had initially planned to seek an injunction to prevent the resumption of the three reactors, but they decided to demand their decommissioning on the grounds that it would be impossible to completely protect the Hamaoka plant from the threat of earthquakes and tsunamis.

Before filing the suit, Kosai Mayor Mikami, 66, said, "I want to eliminate all risks to protect our children's lives and our community."

He is the only municipal leader in Shizuoka Prefecture to seek denuclearization in the wake of the emergency at the nuclear plant in Fukushima Prefecture.

Some city assembly members have criticized him for joining the lawsuit as mayor, but Mikami said, "My participation in the suit will lead the state and people in Japan to directly address the nuclear issue."

Kyodo, July 1, 2011

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20110701p2g00m0dm012000c.html>

Archipelago...

KEPCO to seek extension of reactor past 40 years

Kansai Electric Power Co. this month will seek government approval to continue operating a reactor beyond July 2012, which marks its 40th year in service at the Mihama nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture.

KEPCO is required to submit a report on the condition of the No. 2 reactor at Mihama by July 25. Company officials say no problems have been found with the reactor, and that KEPCO will ask to extend its operations.

In November, the Mihama plant's No. 1 reactor became the second in the nation to enter service beyond 40 years. KEPCO plans to continue using this reactor for about 10 more years before it is replaced.

Utilities are required to submit reports on the condition of aging reactors every 10 years after exceeding 30 years of service.

Asahi Shimbun , July 2, 2011

<http://www.asahi.com/english/TKY201107010253.html>

Power pinch may hit five utilities in winter

The industry ministry has estimated that five utilities will be unable to meet between 4 and 20 percent of peak electricity demand from December to February if their nuclear reactors, currently shut down for regular inspections, do not resume operations, ministry sources said Saturday.

In such a scenario, the combined electricity generating capacity of the five power companies - Tohoku Electric, Kansai Electric, Hokuriku Electric, Shikoku Electric and Kyushu Electric - would fall short by 5.7 million kw, according to the estimate.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry made the forecast based on the five utilities' electricity supply plans and the assumption that maximum demand for power will level off on a year-to-year basis.

If the idled reactors of the five companies are not restarted, their power generating capacity is projected to fall short of maximum demand by 20.1 percent for Hokuriku Electric, 15.3 percent for Shikoku Electric, 9.4 percent for Kyushu Electric, 8.8 percent for Tohoku Electric and 4.3 percent for Kansai Electric.

In contrast, METI expects that Tokyo Electric Power Co., along with three other utilities - Hokkaido Electric, Chubu Electric and Chugoku Electric - will be able to generate enough electricity to exceed peak demand by 1 to 5 percent.

If reactors shut down for regular inspections remain idle through next summer, power shortfalls of between 9 and 22 percent are expected in the service areas of all utilities except Chugoku Electric and Chubu Electric.

Nuclear reactors must in principle be shut down for inspection after every 13 months of service, and power companies have to obtain consent from local authorities to restart them.

While 35 of the nation's 54 reactors are currently shut down, the remainder will undergo regular checks by next summer.

METI also estimates that the combined cost of liquefied natural gas and other fuels to run thermal power plants while nuclear reactors are out of service will top ¥3 trillion a year at the nine utilities

that operate atomic power plants.

Kyodo, July 3, 2011

<http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20110703a1.html>

Japan-Jordan Nuclear Treaty in Limbo amid Crisis

Tokyo, July 18 (Jiji Press)—Approval of a Japan-Jordan nuclear cooperation treaty has been held up in Japanese parliament due to criticism of the government's sloppy handling of the nuclear crisis and confusion over energy policy.

The impasse over the treaty, which would serve as the basis for nuclear power plant exports from Japan, could frustrate Japanese companies' bid for nuclear plant projects in Jordan.

Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd. and France's Areva SA have set up a joint venture in an attempt to win contracts to build nuclear plants in Jordan later this year. The pair is competing with Russian and Canadian companies.

Japan's House of Councillors, the upper chamber of parliament, approved the treaty on March 31, and the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives, the lower chamber, was to take a vote on it on April 13.

But the vote was postponed after the government raised on April 12 the severity rating of the nuclear accident at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s <9501> Fukushima No. 1 plant to Level 7, the worst on the International Nuclear and Radiological Event Scale.

Jiji Press, July 18, 2011

<http://jen.jiji.com/jc/eng?g=eco&k=2011071800273>
