

# Japan: Prime Minister Naoto Kan opens controversies for advocating a society free of nuclear power

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## Kan under fire from Cabinet for advocating nuclear-free society

Prime Minister Naoto Kan drew fire from members of his Cabinet on July 15 for advocating a society free of nuclear power in the aftermath of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

Kansei Nakano, chairman of the National Public Safety Commission, led the charge, telling an informal meeting of Cabinet ministers, "We ministers never heard about this before. We want the prime minister to explain his real intentions and the content of his remarks."

Kan defended his comments, saying, "I thought it was time to convey my own resolve" to achieve a society that does not depend on nuclear energy.

At the informal gathering, some members of his Cabinet proposed another meeting of Cabinet members to talk about Japan's nuclear power policy. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano signaled readiness to hold such a session early next week.

Finance Minister Yoshihiko Noda said at a news conference, "I took it as his personal opinion," adding the premier's remarks do not represent government policy.

Akihiro Ohata, minister of land, infrastructure, transport and tourism, said he believes that Kan's remarks on July 13 on bringing Japan's dependence on nuclear energy to an end summarize the premier's personal view.

National policy minister Koichiro Genba commented, "If we are to reduce the number of nuclear power plants to zero, there should be full-scale debate, including on the nuclear fuel cycle. We shouldn't rush to reach a conclusion."

Goshi Hosono, minister in charge of nuclear accidents, said, "It will be very difficult now to build new nuclear power plants. Reducing Japan's dependence on nuclear power plants is not policy debate but reality."

Defense Minister Toshimi Kitazawa, who works closely with Kan, said, "It is natural to seriously discuss the prime minister's appeal to the public."

Justice Minister Satsuki Eda also defended the premier, saying, "The prime minister raised the issue of nuclear energy. He is headed in the right direction."

**Mainichi Shimbun, July 15, 2011**

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/07/15/20110715p2a00m0na010000c.html>

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## **Kan says nuclear phaseout plan 'personal'**

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Prime Minister Naoto Kan on Friday told Cabinet members that the policy he announced this week of trying to build a society that does not depend on nuclear energy is “personal,” not government policy, Finance Minister Yoshihiko Noda said.

The disparity over Kan’s views on nuclear issues within the Cabinet also became clearer. National Public Safety Commission chief Kansei Nakano said Kan’s remarks Wednesday at a news conference are “causing confusion” as he and other Cabinet members were not informed in advance what the premier would say.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano said an informal Cabinet meeting on nuclear issues will likely be held early next week.

Noda told a news conference that the government should not decide on Japan’s future stance on nuclear energy “too hastily.”

Economics minister Kaoru Yosano said the issue of how to reduce Japan’s dependence on nuclear energy must be addressed within the wider context of energy policy.

“It will likely take a fairly long time before the country can completely reduce nuclear power generation,” Yosano, known as a proponent of atomic energy, said.

On Wednesday, Kan said Japan should aim to eventually pull out of nuclear energy after gradually reducing its use in the coming years in the wake of the serious accident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

Before the March 11 earthquake and tsunami ravaged the Fukushima plant, nuclear energy accounted for about 30 percent of electricity generated in Japan.

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<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/07/15/20110715p2g00m0dm102000c.html>

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## **Gov’t to suspend nuclear cooperation talks after Kan’s nuclear remarks**

TOKYO (Kyodo) — The government has decided to suspend talks with Brazil and four other countries concerning the sale of Japanese-made nuclear power equipment and technology after Prime Minister Naoto Kan called this week for Japan’s eventual exit from nuclear power, government sources said Thursday.

The decision concerns negotiations over completing separate nuclear power cooperation agreements with Brazil, India, South Africa, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates. Negotiations with all five countries have stalled since the earthquake and tsunami in March triggered a nuclear crisis in northeastern Japan.

The decision to suspend talks with five countries with plans to build nuclear plants in the immediate future could cause Japanese companies to lag further behind such rivals as South Korea and Russia in the global competition to clinch nuclear power plant contracts with emerging economies.

Japan needs to sign bilateral nuclear cooperation agreement with a foreign country and have it endorsed by parliament in order to export nuclear power technology and equipment.

Any move to proceed with the talks now “could risk contradicting the prime minister’s policy,” said one government source.

So the government will not schedule any high-level talks with the five prospective buyer countries on completing nuclear cooperation accords without a green light from Kan, the source indicated.

Ministries involved in forging the accord, including the industry ministry and the Foreign Ministry, will hold off to also see if and when Prime Minister Kan resigns.

Kan has expressed his intention to step down if three conditions are met during the current Diet session, including the parliamentary passage of a bill aimed at promoting the use of renewable energy sources.

The government has told Brazil its intention to slow down their working-level talks while conveying to the United Arab Emirates that formally reaching an agreement would be delayed even though negotiations have effectively been completed, according to diplomatic sources.

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<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/07/15/20110715p2g00m0dm009000c.html>

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## **Japan not announcing complete phasing out of nuclear power: Edano**

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Japan has not announced a complete phasing out of nuclear power, the top government spokesman said Thursday, in reference to Prime Minister Naoto Kan’s remarks a day before.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano told a news conference that Kan’s call to create a society that does not rely on nuclear energy should be understood as “a hope for the distant future,” rather than the government’s official policy.

Edano pointed out that Kan had said Japan would use nuclear power plants for many more years by enhancing their safety, so the remarks should be taken as “the start of a national debate” on Japan’s new energy policy.

The spokesman also said both ruling and opposition lawmakers have agreed on the importance of reducing Japan’s dependency on nuclear power and he believes that this view has become a national consensus.

On Wednesday, Kan told a nationally televised news conference that Japan should aim for a society that does not depend on nuclear power

generation "by reducing the use of such energy" systematically and in stages" in the wake of the crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

The premier, however, did not set a specific time frame and say how exactly Japan would gradually be free from nuclear energy.

Edano also said the government needs to have a medium-term review on what to do with its current policy of promoting exports of nuclear technology as a source of economic growth.

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<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/07/14/20110714p2g00m0dm101000c.html>

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### **Kan's energy speech draws praise, skepticism, resignation**

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Prime Minister Naoto Kan's speech Wednesday in which he expressed his idea for a society not reliant on nuclear power drew high praise from environmentalists, while victims of the March 11 disaster expressed skepticism.

The mayor of a southwestern Japan town hosting the Genkai nuclear power plant, meanwhile, said it will now be difficult for him to approve its reactors' restart after Kan called for the eventual withdrawal from nuclear power. He said he feels "resigned."

Kiko Network, a civic group, said, "It will be remembered as a day when a major shift in energy policy was made as (Kan) became the first among successive prime ministers to declare the idea of ending reliance on nuclear power."

The group earlier presented an estimate that Japan can ride out summer peak electricity demand through power conservation even if all nuclear reactors are stopped.

Greenpeace Japan said, "It is a logical policy when we place priority on safety and a sense of security for the generations to come following the accident at Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant."

But a 46-year-old self-employed man in Onagawa, Miyagi Prefecture, a town damaged by the March 11 disaster that hosts a nuclear power plant, said, "How far can I trust the words of a prime minister resigning soon?"

Kenichi Fukono, 62, a temp staff in the city of Minamisoma, who had to evacuate from a region near the Fukushima plant, said, "Since the days just after the accident, the government has not been so sensitive about people in Fukushima Prefecture. No matter what the prime minister says, I just cannot believe it."

A utility worker in Matsue, Shimane Prefecture, host to a nuclear power plant, said, "I understand the prime minister's idea about withdrawing from nuclear power but what does he have in mind about securing replacement power. I also find it difficult to understand why he had to say it at this point in time." Genkai Mayor Hideo Kishimoto told Kyodo News he feels "resigned" about the situation, saying, "We cannot defy the premier and say that only we will resume."

Kishimoto made his remarks soon after Kan made clear in his latest news conference that Japan should aim for a society that does not depend on nuclear power in the wake of the crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

The mayor criticized the premier for being "inconsistent" in his past remarks regarding whether or not to restart the reactors.

"He is simply saying things that would make him look good," said Kishimoto, who earlier this month approved the restart of two reactors suspended for regular checkups in line with the industry ministry's request.

Kishimoto later retracted his approval after the government's flip-flop on the issue.

The two Genkai reactors would have been the first to resume operations since the March 11 earthquake and tsunami that triggered the nuclear crisis.

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### **Kan says Japan should aim for nuclear-free society**

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Prime Minister Naoto Kan said Wednesday that Japan should aim for a society that does not depend on nuclear power in the wake of the crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi plant, but denied the possibility of calling for a general election over energy issues.

Kan made his strongest pledge to reduce Japan's reliance on nuclear power since he took office a little over a year ago. Still, apart from calling for more conservation efforts and use of renewable energy, he stopped short of saying by when and how Japan will aim for the new goal.

Whether the dramatic shift in Japan's energy policy will materialize is also unpredictable as it was proposed by Kan who has faced mounting pressure to quit immediately, even from lawmakers within his own ruling party.

Environmentalists, nevertheless, said Kan's commitment is historic and should merit high praise.

"Considering the huge risk of a nuclear accident, I have really felt that this technology cannot be controlled by conventional safety

measures," Kan said at a news conference, held for the first time since June 27.

"So I have come to realize...that Japan should aim for a society that does not depend on nuclear power generation"by phasing out such energy"systematically and in stages."

There was speculation that Kan, a strong proponent of increasing the use of renewable energy, might dissolve the lower house this summer, timed with memorial ceremonies for the U.S. atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki more than 60 years ago, to try to break the political stalemate.

But Kan said he is not "at all considering whether to dissolve" the chamber in connection with nuclear issues, although he said Japan's future energy policy needs to be eventually decided by the public.

The latest remarks came after the government's announcement Monday that two-step additional safety assessments dubbed "stress tests" will be conducted on Japan's nuclear facilities.

The announcement has raised concern among business leaders about summer power shortages that could hurt the economy.

Kan, who could resign next month, said Japan is capable of overcoming power shortages in the summer and winter peak seasons, even if nuclear reactors shut for routine checkups do not resume, as long as the public and the industry continue to cooperate in saving energy.

He said the government is preparing to release electricity supply forecasts for this year "in the not-too-distant future" and from next year plans must be made by thinking of using more natural gas to help offset a power shortage by nuclear generation facilities.

Nuclear reactors idled for periodic inspections now need to pass the first phase of the tests — which will gauge to what extent they can tolerate massive earthquakes, tsunami and other phenomena beyond their present designed capacity — before restarting.

The second phase of the tests will be more comprehensive and target all 54 of the country's reactors.

The premier said the suspended reactors could operate again if their safety is ensured.

Four months after the Fukushima plant was crippled by a tsunami, only 19 reactors are running in Japan, while local governments have been reluctant to allow those that have been taken offline to resume as many residents are concerned about their safety.

Before the world's worst nuclear accident in 25 years at the Fukushima plant, nuclear power accounted for about 30 percent of Japan's electricity supply.

Kan, in office since June last year, has been criticized for his perceived lack of leadership in dealing with the aftermath of the March disaster. His approval ratings have dropped to less than 20 percent in recent weeks.

On June 2, Kan survived a no-confidence motion by promising to hand over to the younger generation, once certain progress is made in rebuilding the disaster-stricken northeastern region and containing the nuclear crisis.

In his previous news conference, Kan said he would step down after securing parliamentary passage of the forthcoming extra budget for additional disaster-relief measures, a bill to enable the government to issue bonds to fund about 40 percent of the revenue planned in this fiscal year's annual budget through March 31 and a bill to promote the use of renewable energy.

The second extra budget for fiscal 2011 is expected to be enacted this month, but it remains uncertain whether the two bills can be approved by winning enough support from opposition parties during the current Diet session, which will run through Aug. 31, as they have been calling for his early resignation for months.

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