

# What future for Japan N-plants?

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## **Japan to seek to scale back on nuclear power in new energy strategy**

TOKYO (Kyodo) — The Japanese government decided Friday to draw up a scenario for reducing the country's reliance on nuclear power in its energy strategy to be worked out next year following the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant, but recognized the need to use atomic reactors to deal with imminent electricity shortage problems.

The government also unveiled a set of near-term measures to tackle the power crunch that has emerged as a result of the crisis, showing an estimate that the country's power supply capacity could be about 9.2 percent short of peak demand next summer if no reactors are in operation by that time.

Japan is reviewing its earlier policy to promote atomic energy as the nuclear crisis, triggered in the wake of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami, has raised serious doubts among the public about the safety of nuclear reactors.

The government plans to compile a basic policy of its energy strategy by the end of the year, and the strategy itself next year, based on an outline of its energy policy decided Friday. But the outline did not touch on whether Japan should seek to become a society that does not depend on nuclear energy, as stated by Prime Minister Naoto Kan as his "personal view."

"As for the reduction of the ratio of the country's reliance on nuclear power plants, we should decide how we should act by deepening public discussions," a government paper said.

It also said that "nuclear power plants that have been confirmed as safe should be used" in the meantime as power supply and demand are unstable.

Kan told a press conference later Friday, "Based on today's decisions, we would further engage in discussions (on energy matters)... The government will push for the reduction of nuclear reliance systematically and in stages."

In addition to fears of power shortages, the government also said there is a risk that the country's electricity generation costs may rise by more than 3 trillion yen if all nuclear power were replaced

by thermal power using oil or liquefied natural gas.

To keep the imminent power supply crunch and rise in electricity bills to a minimum, the government said it plans to promote the introduction of energy-efficient products such as light-emitting diodes and to intensively deploy in the next five years “smart meters” that help control electricity consumption.

The spread of smart meters would help achieve more swiftly a “smart grid” next-generation power delivery network, which is also expected to make much greater use of renewable energy sources such as solar and wind, the paper said.

The government also encouraged the separation of electricity generation and transmission to create a competitive environment in the country’s electricity businesses.

Japan’s basic energy plan endorsed in June 2010 sought to increase the ratio of the country’s reliance on nuclear energy to 53 percent by 2030, but Kan said earlier that the government had no choice but to scrap that plan in the wake of the Fukushima crisis.

The envisioned new energy strategy will be considered through three time frames — short term covering the next three years, the medium term to 2020, and the long term between 2020 and 2030 or between 2020 and 2050.

**Kyodo**, July 30, 2011

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/07/30/20110730p2g00m0dm012000c.html>

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## **Saga Gov. Advises Kyushu Electric on Pronuclear Views**

Saga, July 30 (Jiji Press)—Saga Governor Yasushi Furukawa revealed Saturday that he had advised Kyushu Electric Power Co. to put more focus on pronuclear voices at a government-sponsored town meeting in June, where the company attempted to sway public opinion in favor of nuclear energy.

On June 21, days before the town meeting, Furukawa met with then Kyushu Electric Vice President Mamoru Dangami and told him, “If there are calls from the business world for the restart, such voices should be presented” at the event, Furukawa explained at an unscheduled press conference in the prefectural capital of Saga.

He was referring to the issue of whether two reactors at the company’s Genkai nuclear plant in Saga Prefecture should be allowed to restart after regular maintenance.

“I said this because there were only opposing views and I thought a wide range of opinions should be presented,” Furukawa told reporters.

He denied suggesting to Kyushu Electric that the company should mobilize employees to send e-mails to the town meeting in support of the reactors being reactivated. But he said what he did was “careless.”

**Jiji Press**, July 30, 2011

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

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## **Chubu Electric unable to remove damaged nuclear fuel rod for 17 years**

SHIZUOKA (Kyodo) — Chubu Electric Power Co. revealed Thursday it has been unable to remove a spent fuel rod that was damaged in an accident 17 years ago from its Hamaoka nuclear power plant in Shizuoka Prefecture.

While spent nuclear fuel is normally sent to the reprocessing plant in Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture or elsewhere, the damaged rod remains inside the fuel pool of the plant's now decommissioned No. 1 reactor, in a special container, it said.

The company said it had asked domestic research organizations and foreign nuclear fuel firms to take it but to no avail, and is still pondering how to get the rod outside in the absence of clear government rules on how to dispose of damaged fuel that requires more delicate handling.

Chubu Electric denied the same day that it had urged employees and workers at the Hamaoka plant to express support for its so-called pluthermal nuclear power generation project in a government-sponsored promotion event in 2007 when it let them know the event would be held in advance.

After Kyushu Electric Power Co. recently became embroiled in a scandal in which it admitted to an attempt to fake public backing in a similar event, the Economy, Trade and Industry ministry has required electric power companies in Japan to see if they have had similar problems and submit results of internal probes by Friday.

The company serving central Japan asked its employees and workers from its contractors to attend a symposium hosted by the ministry in August 2007 for local people to get a better grasp of the pluthermal project planned for the plant, sources close to the matter said Thursday.

Pluthermal power generation uses plutonium-uranium mixed oxide fuel in an existing reactor and is an important pillar of Japan's nuclear program.

Of 524 people who attended the event, 357 expressed support for the project, the sources said.

The Nagoya-based utility, which postponed the project after the Fukushima nuclear crisis erupted in March and then shut down the Hamaoka plant later at the government's request, says it will inform the ministry as soon as it compiles results of an in-house investigation.

Kyushu Electric has admitted a total of 141 people, including 45 of its employees, sent comments to a government-sponsored television program, aired June 26, via e-mail and fax amid a secret campaign to boost support for the company's plan to reactivate its nuclear reactors.

**Kyodo**, July 28, 2011

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/07/28/20110728p2g00m0dm100000c.html>

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## **NISA asked Chubu Electric to stage questions in nuclear symposium**

The government's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) asked Chubu Electric Power Co. to gather participants for a 2007 nuclear power symposium and create questions for locals to ask so that the symposium wouldn't be dominated by opponents of a "pluthermal" nuclear power project, the power company disclosed on July 29.

Chubu Electric asked employees to attend the government-sponsored symposium in Omaezaki, Shizuoka Prefecture, but rejected the staged questions. The finding, which emerged during investigations following an e-mail scandal involving Kyushu Electric Power Co., reveals that not only power company members but also NISA have been involved in manipulating public opinion.

Chubu Electric said that the group head of the company's nuclear power department created drafts of questions to be posed by local participants at the request of NISA. However, company officials concluded that asking participants to state specific opinions would raise compliance problems, and in the end did not carry out NISA's request.

The proposed questions, which the company saved, included those about the cost of natural energy and "pluthermal" nuclear power, and how long fossil fuels would last.

However, because of NISA's request for the power company to send participants to the symposium and because officials judged that it would not be good for the symposium to be left with empty seats, Chubu Electric asked its employees and those of subsidiaries to participate. The company, which says it did not force employees to attend, has expressed regret over the incident.

"Though it wasn't necessarily a violation in terms of compliance, we are deeply reflecting on the fact that some have thought that we intended to lead the debate," a company representative commented.

A total of 524 people attended the symposium, which focused on a "pluthermal" project at the Hamaoka Nuclear Power Plant, and 12 residents asked questions, but they were mostly about promotion of the project and fears regarding earthquake resistance. Chubu Electric said it was unclear how many participants had turned up because of its request, though it said it had confirmed that none of the questions came from people associated with the company.

A total of 357 participants answered questionnaires at the symposium, and 59 percent answered that they "understood" or "basically understood" the need for pluthermal facilities.

"We didn't intend to slant the questionnaire, but we invited misunderstanding," a company representative said.

**Mainichi Shimbun** , July 29, 2011

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/07/29/20110729p2a00m0na021000c.html>

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## **No Restart of N-Reactors Even after Stress Tests: Niigata Gov.**

Tokyo, July 26 (Jiji Press)—Niigata Governor Hirohiko Izumida said Tuesday that he will not allow three halted nuclear reactors in his central Japan prefecture to resume operations even after they undergo government “stress tests.”

Conducting such tests on nuclear reactors without learning lessons from the crisis at Tokyo Electric Power Co.’s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power station, which was severely damaged by the March 11 earthquake and tsunami, is nothing more than a placebo, Izumida said.

It is out of the question for the prefectural government to allow the restart of the No. 2 to No. 4 nuclear reactors at TEPCO’s Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant under the false cover of safety based on stress tests, he told reporters here.

The reactors are currently inactive due to routine maintenance checks. Izumida called on the central government to investigate whether or not the March quake ruptured pipes and caused other problems at the Fukushima plant than a station blackout caused by tsunami.

**Jiji Press**, July 26, 2011

<http://jen.jiji.com/jc/eng?g=eco&k=2011072600698>

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## **Power companies’ generation figures called into question amid push for reactor restarts**

As Japan strives to conserve power following the closure of nuclear reactors in the wake of the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, suggestions have arisen that power companies are underestimating their generating capacity.

Recently one opposition lawmaker questioned whether power companies, which want to restart their nuclear reactors, have been giving low estimates of the nation’s power supply. Prime Minister Naoto Kan, meanwhile, has shown increasing distrust toward the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), and ordered a review of the nation’s power supplies.

According to METI, the generating capacity of thermal power generation and hydroelectric power generation in fiscal 2009 was 192 million kilowatts. In comparison, peak demand during the high-use summer period ranged between 170 million and 180 million kilowatts. In light of these figures, Social Democratic Party leader Mizuho Fukushima has declared that electricity needs can be covered without nuclear power.

Thermal power generation, however, requires regular inspections, and with hydroelectric power, a drop in water supply in the summer means the facilities can't be used to their full potential, according to the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan.

Industry minister Banri Kaieda told the House of Councillors Budget Committee on July 25 that Japan can supply "about 157 million kilowatts" of electricity from non-nuclear sources.

At the end of July, about 70 percent of the 57.2 million kilowatts provided by Tokyo Electric Power Co. was produced through thermal generation, while hydroelectric generation accounted for 20 to 25 percent.

The company has pumped-storage facilities that can generate about 9.6 million kilowatts of electricity, but since the nuclear power plants that have supplied the electricity for pumps are down, only about 7 million kilowatts has been included in figures.

Kansai Electric Power Co. had facilities at the end of fiscal 2010 with a generating capacity of 34.88 million kilowatts, but the listed generating capacity for August stands at 29.43 million kilowatts. Only 14.18 million kilowatts of the 16.91 million kilowatt capacity of the firm's thermal plants has been included in figures. A total of 2.4 million kilowatts cannot be produced due to the suspension of facilities due to aging and other reasons, and company president Makoto Yagi says it would take two to three years to restart them.

The generating capacity of Kansai Electric's hydroelectric power facilities, meanwhile, is 8.2 million kilowatts, but based on past figures, the highest amount that can be expected from them is 6.24 million kilowatts. The company's Sakai solar power generation station that will be completed in October with a generating capacity of 10,000 kilowatts can already produce 6,290 kilowatts. However, as generating ability is swayed by the weather and other factors, the company has not included figures from the station in its total.

**Mainichi Shimbun** , July 26, 2011

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/news/20110726p2a00m0na004000c.html>

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## **70% back Kan's nuclear tack, ditto seek his exit**

A weekend telephone poll conducted by Kyodo News found 70.3 percent of respondents support Prime Minister Naoto Kan's call for a society that does not rely on nuclear power, but public support for his Cabinet sank to 17.1 percent, the lowest level since it was inaugurated just over a year ago, from 23.2 percent in the previous poll.

In the survey, 66.9 percent said they want Kan to quit by the end of August when the Diet session

ends, while the disapproval rating for the Cabinet climbed to 70.6 percent from 61.2 percent in the last poll conducted June 28 and 29.

The public was split over the decision of Kan's government to double the consumption tax to 10 percent by the mid-2010s, with 52.2 percent expressing support and 45.0 percent opposed, according to the poll.

The latest survey was based on replies from 1,014 respondents selected randomly by computer Saturday and Sunday across the country, except for areas in the disaster-hit Tohoku region.

On Kan's idea for a society without nuclear power, 31.6 percent expressed support while 38.7 percent expressed qualified support for the idea. On the renewable energy bill that aims to establish a mechanism for power companies to buy solar power at fixed tariffs, 78.2 percent expressed support, while 14.2 percent were opposed.

Support for Kan's Democratic Party of Japan, meanwhile, dropped to 14.7 percent, the lowest since the September 2009 inauguration of the DPJ government. It was down from 21.9 percent in late June.

The previous low was 17.4 percent marked in late April. Support for the Liberal Democratic Party rose to 25.9 percent from 22.8 percent.

**Kyodo**, July 25, 2011

<http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20110725a2.html>

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## **Foes in METI tried to nix nuclear fuel cycle — Crisis may doom multitrillion yen project LDP, utilities green-lighted**

In spring 2004, young bureaucrats at the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry urged their boss to halt the government-backed nuclear fuel cycle project, which involves reprocessing spent nuclear fuel to produce plutonium that can be reused to produce electricity.

"But we're talking about ¥19 trillion!" one of the junior ministry officials shouted at the superior. "Do you really think it's OK to slip that much money into the electricity bill?"

In what was effectively an attempted coup, the young bureaucrats who were opposed to using such a large amount of taxpayer money for the project tried to stop it at the last minute.

As the government and Tokyo Electric Power Co. continue to struggle to stabilize the Fukushima No. 1 power plant, the nuclear fuel cycle project is at a crossroads and the misgivings that METI officials expressed about the fuel cycle program seven years ago, albeit apparently more because of economic instead of safety concerns, is a factor now.

At the time, the METI officials produced a document titled "A bill of ¥19 trillion to fund the nuclear fuel cycle project that cannot be stopped," and distributed it to ministries and around the Nagata-cho political hub.

The document estimated the cost of building and operating a reprocessing plant at around ¥19

trillion, and in one scenario as much as ¥50 trillion. The report also pointed out that there were no immediate, or specific, plans at the time to operate fast-breeder reactors, which use reprocessed plutonium to produce more plutonium. The only such reactor, the prototype Monju in Fukui Prefecture, suffered a sodium leak accident and fire in 1995 that its operator then tried to hide. It has only been in recent months that the push resumed in earnest to restart it — but March 11 put that on hold.

It also said the project would produce a huge amount of highly toxic radioactive waste.

“The nation cannot admit that it made a mistake, that its policy is obsolete. And the public will be forced to shoulder the costs,” it said.

At the time, a nuclear fuel reprocessing plant in Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture, was about to start a test run. If the plant started operating, the facility would be contaminated and the cost of suspending operations would be huge.

The young METI bureaucrats thought it was their last chance.

“The utilities industry was also reluctant,” said a source involved in the project. “If a company decides on its own to abandon the project, (its management) will be held responsible for the decision. But if the government decides to stop the project, (a utility company executive) had said he would follow the order.”

The ¥19 trillion cost is an estimate that the power industry came up with, suggesting the true cost may be even higher.

But Tepco and other utilities used their political connections to strike a deal with the Liberal Democratic Party-led government.

According to one former bureaucrat, when the government eased regulations in 2003, allowing more companies to sell electricity, the power industry in exchange demanded that they be allowed to raise electricity fees to cover the huge costs of operating reprocessing plants in the future. The government accepted the request.

What the document cast doubt on was this point.

With many people wary of the government’s nuclear fuel cycle project, the document questioning its safety and cost-effectiveness seemed to build momentum to halt it.

However, the move was defeated by politicians and power companies, and the young METI officials were transferred to other departments or quit the ministry.

Utilities subsequently raised electricity fees to build reserves to cover future reprocessing costs. So far, more than ¥2 trillion has been set aside.

But amid the Fukushima crisis, Prime Minister Naoto Kan has expressed his intention to rethink and possibly scuttle the nuclear fuel cycle project.

The project will only be effective if fast-breeder reactors are put into operation.

“It is taking a great deal of trouble to cool the reactors with water (at the Fukushima plant),” said a bureaucrat who asked to remain anonymous. “The public will think that operating fast-breeder reactors using sodium as a coolant won’t work.”



The reprocessing plant in the village of Rokkasho has effectively suspended operations since the end of 2007 due to technical problems.

But its equipment is already contaminated with radiation and it would cost several hundred billion yen to dismantle the plant.

Some say the ¥2 trillion reserve could be used for that purpose, but others argue it should be used to compensate victims of the Fukushima crisis.

Meanwhile, spent nuclear fuel continues to pile up in reprocessing plants and power plants. Storage facilities nationwide are nearly full, casting a shadow over the future of atomic power in Japan.

But whether the government decides to proceed with or abandon the nuclear fuel cycle project, a tough road lies ahead.

**Kyodo**, July 30, 2011

<http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20110730f1.html>

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