

Japan: Symposium critical of media coverage on nuclear plant crisis

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A symposium themed on nuclear power plants and the media was held in Tokyo on the heels of the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

The symposium, held at a civic hall in Tokyo's Shinjuku Ward on July 19, discussed how the domestic media reported on the nuclear crisis and how the social climate has changed since the accident.

While there has emerged a movement to break away from nuclear power generation in the wake of the March 11 Great East Japan Earthquake, panelist Shigenori Kanehira, a TBS newscaster, warned that the recent trend of the public rapidly losing interest in the Fukushima nuclear accident would be hard to stop.

"I wonder if it's because of the physical distance (from the accident site), but I get the feeling that the public's concern with the accident is rapidly on the wane," said Kanehira, who has covered workers struggling to bring the crippled nuclear power plant under control.

"Although members of the general public became painfully aware of the absurdity of nuclear power plants following the quake-disaster, they're apparently hoping to leave the issue behind as soon as possible," Kanehira said.

Lawyer Hiroyuki Kawai, who is poised to file suits seeking an injunction against nuclear power plants across Japan sometime after September, testified, "The attitude of judges, who had been brainwashed into believing the safety myth of nuclear power plants, has changed since the Fukushima accident."

"We shouldn't keep nuclear power plants operating in this quake-prone country of Japan," Kawai said, stressing the importance of his planned lawsuits.

Journalist Satoshi Kamata, who along with Nobel laureate and novelist Kenzaburo Oe has launched an antinuclear energy signature-collecting campaign, said, "The quake-disaster has made us realize that nuclear power generation is not clean energy. There's been an atmosphere in favor of parting with nuclear power plants, but we should take action demanding their immediate halt instead of just waiting for their natural attrition."

"Makorinu" of the comedian duo Oshidori, who has attended press conferences by plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) and other organizations since the nuclear accident, recalled getting the impression that some media reports were far removed from the realities of the accident site.

"There are good news reports and bad ones. In order to distinguish them, we should obtain information by ourselves and think for ourselves," she said.

Journalist Takeharu Watai warned that many media organizations have been indulging in what appears to be "self-censorship" in covering the no-go zone around the crippled nuclear power station

and its premises due to various constraints.

“Such dependent reporting that relies on photographs provided by TEPCO should be rectified as quickly as possible,” Watai said.

Hajime Kitamura, former editor in chief of the weekly magazine Sunday *Mainichi*, said, “While the role of newspapers has been re-evaluated since the quake-disaster, readers could turn their back on them if newspapers do not keep reporting what they should.”

The symposium was sponsored by the monthly magazine “Tsukuru,” published by Tsukuru Publishing Co.

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P.S.

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