

Japan Public Opinion: No to Both N-Power and New Taxes

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74 percent favor gradual reduction of nuclear power plants: Mainichi poll

Seventy-four percent of respondents to a poll by the *Mainichi Shimbun* expressed support for a gradual cutback on nuclear power plants in Japan, while only 11 percent demanded an immediate halt to nuclear energy.

The *Mainichi* poll also found that 56 percent are opposed to a proposed rise in the consumption tax and other taxes to help finance social security costs and reconstruction efforts in the aftermath of the March 11 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami while 41 percent were in favor.

The approval rating for Prime Minister Naoto Kan's Cabinet dropped 4 percentage points from the previous poll in July to 15 percent, the lowest since the launch of the government under the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) in September 2009. The Kan Cabinet's disapproval rating came to 63 percent, up from 56 percent in July.

Japan's energy policy and the pros and cons of a rise in the consumption tax from the current 5 percent are expected to be dominant topics in the upcoming DPJ presidential election to pick Kan's successor. The *Mainichi* poll's results are likely to have an impact on the election.

Kan has proposed an end to the nation's dependence on nuclear energy following the outbreak of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, but it is not clear what direction his policy to promote renewable energy will take due to the prime minister's imminent departure.

Reflecting electricity shortages across Japan and anxiety about social and economic activities due to the ongoing Fukushima crisis, 74 percent were in favor of a gradual phase out of nuclear power plants while only 13 thought there was no such need.

When asked about food contamination by radioactive substances, 71 percent said they have harbored concerns, including 27 percent who are deeply worried, while 23 percent said they are not so anxious. Only 4 percent replied they have no apprehensions at all.

As for the DPJ's agreement with the largest opposition Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the New Komeito party on a review of its manifesto for the 2009 House of Representatives election, including child allowances, 69 percent supported the plan but 27 percent were against the move. The support rate for the review accord among DPJ supporters reached 68 percent.

Under a divided Diet where the opposition camp controls the House of Councillors, 70 percent of respondents to the Mainichi poll expressed their support for “a partial coalition” by the ruling DPJ, the LDP and other parties depending on specific issues involved. Only 17 percent said they support “a grand coalition” by the nation’s largest parties.

Public support for the ruling DPJ stood at 13 percent, unchanged from the previous poll while that for the LDP rose 6 points to 22 percent, a level seen at the end of the last LDP-led government in 2009. The poll found that 49 percent did not have any particular party to support, down 5 points from July.

Mainichi Shimbun, August 22, 2011

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/08/22/20110822p2a00m0na012000c.html>

64 Pct Want N-Reactors Scrapped in Japan: Jiji Poll

Tokyo, Aug. 15 (Jiji Press)—Over 60 pct of Japanese people want the country to get rid of its nuclear reactors, following a series of accidents at Tokyo Electric Power Co.’s <9501> Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power station, a Jiji Press poll showed.

The survey used a rating scale of zero to 10, with five being “neither.”

In the poll, 13.2 pct said nuclear reactors should be scrapped immediately, by selecting a zero rating, far above the 1.3 pct who said such reactors should continue to be promoted, with a 10 rating.

Overall, 64.7 pct basically favored the removal of reactors, checking zero to four, while 7.0 pct said they should be maintained, with ratings of six to 10. The poll showed that 25.1 pct said they support neither course of action.

The survey showed 70.1 pct have worries about the safety of nuclear reactors, picking zero to four, including 20.9 pct who ticked zero, judging them to be completely unsafe. Only 7.7 pct considered the reactors safe, with ratings of six to 10.

Jiji Press, August 15, 2011

Utilities ordered to further check quake-safety data on reactors

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Japan’s nuclear regulatory agency on Monday ordered utilities to further review data on the quake-resistance of their nuclear reactors, after Kansai Electric Power Co. found errors in such data in its 2009 report.

The agency expects the review to be completed by October at the latest.

Nuclear plant operators must first finish the review before aiming to pass the so-called nuclear

“stress tests” required by the government in the wake of the Fukushima Daiichi power plant disaster. The tests were introduced to allay public concerns about the safety of nuclear power.

An official at the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency said that, so far, he does not think utilities would experience a “significant delay” in submitting the outcome of the stress tests to the agency because of the order issued Monday.

Utilities are required to clear the first round of the government’s two-stage stress tests before being allowed to restart nuclear reactors idled for regular maintenance and checkups.

Some errors have been found the past month in quake-safety data, leading the nuclear agency to issue orders aimed at enhancing the credibility of the data. The latest order would make the companies check the data more broadly.

Kansai Electric said that errors were found in the Nos. 3 and 4 reactors of the Takahama plant in Fukui Prefecture and confirmed the reactors’ safety by using the correct data.

Kyodo, August 23, 2011

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/news/20110823p2g00m0dm003000c.html>

Japan tones down nuclear power policy in new 5-yr science strategy

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Japan’s new five-year science and technology program approved by the Cabinet on Friday has excluded references to an earlier draft that promoted next-generation nuclear technologies, reflecting the government’s backpedaling on its atomic power policy amid the ongoing crisis at a crippled nuclear plant.

Noting the urgency of revising the nation’s energy policy in the wake of the nuclear accident, the basic plan covering the five years through March 2016 instead stressed the need to develop renewable energy to deal with an anticipated power shortage, a stance in line with Prime Minister Naoto Kan’s calls for shifting away from nuclear power.

Cabinet approval of the plan, initially scheduled at the end of March, had been postponed to allow the Council for Science and Technology Policy experts to revise an earlier draft that was outlined in December in response to the March 11 earthquake and tsunami disaster.

As a result, references to promoting research and development on fast-breeder reactor fuel cycle, including the Monju prototype, and the next-generation light-water nuclear reactor for practical use, were omitted.

Wording on promoting research and development in nuclear power was watered down as uncertainties remain over the government’s energy and nuclear power policies. Kan, who said in July that Japan will review its energy policy from scratch and try to gradually reduce dependence on nuclear power, is expected to step down as early as the end of this month.

“Given that the nuclear power policy is to be essentially revised in light of the nuclear power plant accident, I think there will also be debates over fuel cycles and Monju,” science and technology minister Yoshiaki Takaki told a news conference after Friday’s Cabinet meeting.

Meanwhile, the basic plan calls for strengthening research and development in areas such as monitoring and decontaminating radiation spewed from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

Takaki said the new strategy places top priority on fields related to rebuilding the areas afflicted by the March 11 disaster and the ensuing nuclear crisis.

Acknowledging that Japan's risk and crisis management were flawed, as seen from the government's handling of the nuclear crisis, the plan states that research on how to protect the public in case of similar accidents involving nuclear power and other high-tech systems will be promoted.

The target for the government's overall research and development expenditure is set about 25 trillion yen, equivalent to 1 percent of the nation's gross domestic product, for the five years.

Kyodo, August 19, 2011

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/08/19/20110819p2g00m0dm071000c.html>

Hokkaido nuclear reactor resumes operations, but other plants not expected to follow suit

A reactor at the Tomari Nuclear Power Plant in the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido resumed commercial operations on Aug. 17, but few experts believe it will pave the way for other idle reactors elsewhere in the country to follow suit.

The final decision to resume operations at the No. 3 reactor at the Tomari Nuclear Power Plant was made after many twists and turns in dealings between Prime Minister Naoto Kan, who seeks to reduce dependence on nuclear power generation, and the industry ministry, who seeks to promote nuclear energy, as well as local governments faced with difficulties in promoting nuclear power generation in the face of worrisome citizens.

There are 39 reactors in Japan that are suspended for regular inspections or due to some kind of trouble. The No. 3 reactor at the Tomari Nuclear Power Plant had already been generating electricity at full capacity under what is known as an "adjustment operation" as part of the final phase of the inspections prior to the outbreak of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. Therefore, the Tomari reactor is different from other idle reactors that need to clear tougher hurdles to resume operations.

"The situation surrounding the No. 3 Tomari reactor is completely different from those of other reactors suspended for regular inspections. I don't think the latest case will serve as a spur to restart other reactors," said a senior official with a utility firm. Despite the fact that the Tomari reactor is the first to resume operations since the Great East Japan Earthquake and the Fukushima nuclear crisis, utility firms are not optimistic about the future of the other idle nuclear reactors.

Following the nuclear policy initiated by Prime Minister Kan, those reactors that are suspended for regular inspections or other reasons are required to clear "stress tests" before restarting their operations. But in the case of the No. 3 reactor at the Tomari Nuclear Power Plant, which had been under an "adjustment operation" since before the Fukushima nuclear crisis, the government

decided not to require the reactor to pass stress tests as a condition for the resumption of operations, with a senior Cabinet secretariat official saying, “the abnormal conditions should not last for a long time.”

On the other hand, the 39 reactors that are suspended for regular inspections or due to some kind of trouble need to pass stress tests and secure approval of local governments to restart their operations.

Specifically, utility firms are supposed to report to the central government their safety analysis based on the results of the “first stage” stress test including the extent to which the reactors can withstand earthquakes and tsunamis. It takes about a month or two for utility firms to complete the process and the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency and the Nuclear Safety Commission will in turn “double check” the safety of the reactors.

Hokkaido, Tohoku, Hokuriku, Kansai and Shikoku electric power companies have already started work to assess the safety of their nuclear reactors, and Tokyo and Kyushu electric power companies are making preparations. But even if the technical safety of their nuclear reactors was confirmed after the “first-stage” assessments, whether they can be restarted or not hinges on “political decisions” by the prime minister, the chief Cabinet secretary, the economy, trade and industry minister, the state minister in charge of nuclear accidents and other ministers concerned.

Furthermore, it is also necessary for utility firms to secure approval of local municipalities that are hosting nuclear power plants and signatories to safety pacts with them. “It is not clear when the procedures leading up to the restart of operations will be completed,” said a senior official of a major utility firm.

Local distrust in nuclear power generation is strong due to the Fukushima nuclear crisis coupled with staged government-sponsored symposiums for local citizens on nuclear reactors. Fukui Prefecture hosts ageing nuclear reactors, including the No. 1 reactor at the Mihama nuclear plant which has been operating for more than 40 years. “Measures against ageing facilities do not seem to be included (in the safety assessments),” said Fukui Gov. Issei Nishikawa in an open criticism of the safety policy.

Hirohiko Izumida, the governor of Niigata, which hosts the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Nuclear Power Plant operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co., is also critical of the government-endorsed safety assessments, saying, “(The safety assessments before the Fukushima nuclear crisis is verified) do nothing but only make someone feel better.”

Mainichi Sjhimbun , August 18, 2011

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/news/20110818p2a00m0na009000c.html>

Nuclear Reactor in Hokkaido to Restart as Early as Tuesday

Sapporo, Aug. 15 (Jiji Press)—A reactor at Hokkaido Electric Power Co.’s <9509> Tomari nuclear power plant could restart commercial operations shortly with local government approval, informed sources said Monday.

The prefectural assembly of Hokkaido, northernmost Japan, decided the same day to hold a meeting of its select committee on energy issues on Tuesday afternoon to discuss resumption of the No.3

reactor at the Tomari plant, which is suspended for regular inspections.

After attending the meeting, Hokkaido Governor Harumi Takahashi is expected to inform industry minister Banri Kaieda of her intention to give the nod to the reactor's restart in light of views in the committee, the sources said.

Kaieda said Wednesday night that he would not issue a certificate of completion for the routine checks to resume the reactor's operations until he obtains the governor's consent.

He made this stance clear after his ministry's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency earlier in that day completed final regulatory examinations and judged that there were no problems with the Tomari plant reactor.

Jiji Press, August 15, 2011

<http://jen.jiji.com/jc/eng?g=eco&k=2011081500643>
