

# **LDP electoral victory good news for Japan nuclear lobby - while problems remain**

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## **Future of nuclear power in Japan fuzzier with LDP win**

While the House of Representatives election manifesto of the victorious Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) does call for an end to a “reliance” on nuclear power, it notably avoids using the term “zero-nuclear” so prominent in the pledges of other parties.

Rather, the LDP promises to decide on the reactivation of idled reactors “within three years,” and to “establish the best mix of energy sources for Japan within 10 years,” effectively putting off a final decision on the nuclear issue for quite some time. Compared to the “end to atomic power in Japan by the 2030s” promised by outgoing Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda and his Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), the LDP’s pledges weaken the drive to end nuclear dependence.

Regarding the restart of Japan’s 50 reactors, the LDP promised to “give absolute priority to the expert opinions of the independent Nuclear Regulation Authority,” or NRA. The NRA will set new safety standards in July next year, and is not expected to do any reactor inspections before then. That is, it is very unlikely any idled reactors will be reactivated before next year’s peak power consumption period in mid-summer.

Meanwhile, the LDP has also promised to keep Japan’s nuclear fuel cycle project going for the long term, a pledge shared with the DPJ. Abe has furthermore indicated he is in favor of continuing development of fast-breeder reactors — reactors specially designed to burn the mixed-oxide plutonium-uranium fuel produced by the fuel cycle program.

Abe has also not ruled out building new reactors. Opposition from local governments and other parties, however, prompted a senior Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry official to say the LDP “probably won’t move on the new reactors issue until after the House of Councillors election next summer.”

*Mainichi Shimbun*, December 17, 2012

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121217p2a00m0na022000c.html>

HAKODATE, Hokkaido – The municipal assembly of Hakodate, Hokkaido, approved funds Tuesday to file a lawsuit to stop construction of a nuclear plant in nearby Aomori Prefecture.

The city is considering resorting to legal action if Electric Power Development Co., better known as J-Power, continues construction of the plant in Oma across the Tsugaru Strait from Hakodate.

Hakodate officials believe the safety of the plant can't be guaranteed and the city could suffer severe damage in the event of a serious accident.

The municipality will ask the new administration to be formed under the leadership of the Liberal Democratic Party, which won a landslide victory in Sunday's election, early next year to order an indefinite freeze on the plant's construction and will sue if its demand is not met.

**Kyodo Press**, December 19, 2012

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121219b2.html>

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### **Nuke: Faults under Aomori nuclear plant site probably active: NRA panel**

A panel under the Nuclear Regulation Authority agreed Thursday that faults under Tohoku Electric Power Co.'s Higashidori atomic plant in Aomori Prefecture are probably active, rejecting earlier arguments to the contrary by the utility.

The situation does not violate the nation's nuclear plant laws because the faults do not run directly beneath the sole reactor at the Higashidori complex, but it may make it difficult for the utility to have the reactor restarted anytime soon.

The Higashidori plant is the third site where the NRA, which debuted in September, has sent experts to check faults suspected of being active.

The focus of the discussion has been the fault F-3, which runs vertically through the plant's premises, and fault F-9, which parallels F-3.

Tohoku Electric has said deformations observed in geological layers were created by clay minerals that swelled on exposure to water, and not because active faults exist under the complex.

The reactor at the Higashidori plant started commercial operations in December 2005 and went offline for regular checks in February 2011, shortly before the nuclear crisis erupted at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 plant.

The area just north of the Higashidori plant is also where Tepco plans to build its own Higashidori plant.

Another team of experts led by the regulatory body has already agreed that a fault running directly underneath a reactor at Japan Atomic Power Co.'s Tsuruga plant in Fukui Prefecture is probably active, an assessment that could leave the utility with no option but to scrap the unit.

A similar team appointed by the NRA visited Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Oi plant, also in Fukui Prefecture, for an assessment, but it has not yet reached a conclusion. Two reactors at Kepco's Oi plant are the only units now operating in Japan.

**Kyodo Press**, December 21, 2012

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121221a1.html>

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## **Tepco moves up nuclear salvage schedule for Fukushima fuel rods to 2014**

Tokyo Electric Power Co. and the government said Monday they will attempt to remove all 1,533 fuel assemblies in the spent-fuel pool perched atop reactor 4 at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 plant by the end of 2014.

The schedule was moved up by a year amid lingering concerns about the condition of the unit, where hundreds of fuel assemblies had been stored before last year's quake and tsunami triggered three core meltdowns at the Fukushima plant and damaged four of its six reactors.

The upper part of the building housing reactor 4 was severely damaged by a hydrogen explosion caused by the meltdowns, sparking concern the remaining structure might collapse in another big quake and dump the pool and its rods onto the ground.

The fuel rods, exposed to the air, might then burn up and release massive amounts of radiation into the atmosphere. Some experts dispute this possibility.

Nevertheless, the issue at unit 4 caused enough concern to have the structure holding up the pool reinforced and a lid put on it.

Tepco plans to start extracting the fuel assemblies in November 2013, a month earlier than scheduled, because debris clearance in the upper part of the building went well enough that it can skip some of the preparatory work that was deemed necessary earlier.

To hasten the process, the utility plans to use two containers instead of one as earlier planned to transport the assemblies to a so-called common pool in a different building at the site. This is expected to provide more stable conditions for keeping the fuel cool.

The operation is part of the process of dismantling units 1 to 4.

When the plant was rocked by the offshore earthquake and its tsunami on March 11, 2011, unit 4 was offline for maintenance and its fresh fuel had been stored in the spent-fuel pool.

The pool contains 1,331 spent fuel assemblies and 202 fresh ones. The utility has already succeeded in taking out two unused assemblies in a trial.

**Kyodo Press**, December 4, 2012

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121204a4.html>

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## **Crisis workers note shady practices**

A recent survey of workers at the disaster-hit Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant indicated questionable

hiring practices, with nearly half saying they received assignments from companies other than those paying their wages, some being told to falsely identify their employers and others unaware of how much radiation they have been exposed to.

Masayuki Ono, an official at Tokyo Electric Power Co., said the utility “will take the results seriously” and “will take measures such as overseeing contractors.”

The survey in September and October indicated that 47.9 percent of 2,423 workers hired by subcontract companies received payment from firms different to those instructing them at the workplace, while 125 said they were asked to misidentify their employers. And about 36 percent of such workers had not been given written or verbal explanations about their employment terms.

On radiation exposure, 15.1 percent of all 3,186 respondents, including bosses, said they did not know their exposure levels.

**Kyodo Press**, Jiji Press, December 5, 2012

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121205a7.html>

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### **Top dose for teen workers at Fukushima plant 57 millisieverts so far**

The highest cumulative radiation dose received by the teenagers employed at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 power plant is 56.89 millisieverts, Tokyo Electric Power Co. said Thursday.

About 20,000 nuclear workers have been exposed to radiation since the Fukushima crisis began in March 2011.

Of them, 64 were 18 to 19 years old and the oldest was 84, according to data up to February submitted to the World Health Organization. There were also 26 workers aged 70 and over.

On average, doses were highest for those in their 20s, at 15.86 millisieverts, followed by 11.64 millisieverts for those in their 40s, who comprised the largest age group, with 5,893 people.

The average dose for teenagers was 8.26 millisieverts, with the one who got the highest dose an actual Tepco employee rather than a subcontractor.

The oldest Tepco worker was 73.

Tepco added up both external and internal radiation exposure to compile the data.

**Jiji Press**, December 8, 2012

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121208b1.html>

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### **Japan could restart some nuclear reactors next summer: NRA**

The secretariat of the Nuclear Regulation Authority may start preliminary safety checks on offline

reactors next spring, paving the way for some to be restarted by summer, sources said Thursday.

The NRA plans to adopt new safety standards for nuclear plants next July in response to the Fukushima No. 1 meltdown disaster that started in March 2011, while 48 of the nation's 50 commercial reactors remain offline amid safety concerns. The two in operation, started back up in July, are running under tentative standards.

To make safety inspections under the new standards efficient, the secretariat plans to launch preliminary checks next spring when an outline of the new standards becomes available, the sources said.

**Kyodo Press**, December 7, 2012

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121207a4.html>

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### **Restart of Tsuruga plant appears difficult due to possible active fault**

TOKYO (Kyodo) — A team of experts under Japan's nuclear regulatory authority agreed Monday that a fault running underneath a reactor at Japan Atomic Power Co.'s Tsuruga plant is likely to be active, an assessment that could leave the company with no option but to scrap the unit.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority will release its own judgment based on the outcome of the experts' discussions, but NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka, who also attended the meeting, said he feels the authority "cannot implement safety assessments for the resumption (of the plant) in the current situation."

It has been known for years that a major active fault called Urazoko lies only about 250 meters from the reactor buildings. But the focus of the latest discussions has been on whether a fault zone of crushed rock called D-1, located beneath the plant's No. 2 reactor, could move in conjunction with the Urazoko fault.

The experts agreed that what appears like an extended section of D-1 had moved as an active fault in the past, together with the movement of the Urazoko fault, Kunihiro Shimazaki, an NRA commissioner who leads the team, said in wrapping up the meeting.

It is the first time that a panel under the newly launched NRA has reached the conclusion that an existing reactor may be sitting directly above an active fault, a situation not allowed under safety screening guidance for nuclear power plants in the quake-prone country.

Japan Atomic Power said in a statement that the outcome was "totally unacceptable," noting that the experts focused largely on geological formation data and not other aspects, and vowed to continue an additional investigation on the plant's premises to counter the assessment.

But Shimazaki suggested during a press conference later in the day that he feels no need to wait for the company to carry out further studies, saying his team had "reached a decision based on the data we have now."

The extended section of D-1 falls within the definition of an active fault that Shimazaki thinks appropriate, which is a fault that has moved in the last 400,000 years.

Shimazaki also said the fact that a large fault like Urazoko exists on the premises of the plant was also taken into consideration by the experts.

He added, "If plant operators know there is an active fault at the site in the first place, they will usually not build (a nuclear complex) there."

The Tsuruga plant on the Sea of Japan coast has two units, with the No. 1 reactor starting commercial operation in 1970 and the No. 2 reactor in 1987. But it was not until 2008 that the Urazoko fault was confirmed to be active by Japan Atomic Power.

Japan Atomic Power, which owns the Tsuruga plant and the Tokai No. 2 plant, has run its business by selling electricity to its major shareholders such as Tokyo Electric Power Co. and Kansai Electric Power Co.

Some local residents were stunned by the NRA-led team's judgment. Tsuruga Mayor Kazuharu Kawase said the outcome was "very tough" but added there is a possibility that safety could be confirmed through additional investigations.

Japan has been reviewing the risks posed by active faults in the wake of the nuclear crisis at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima Daiichi complex, which was triggered by a huge earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

Of the 50 surviving commercial reactors in Japan, only two reactors at Kansai Electric Power Co's Oi plant, also in Fukui Prefecture, are currently online.

Another NRA-appointed team has already visited the Oi plant to check faults there, but it has not yet reached a conclusion.

The NRA plans to send similar teams of experts to at least four other facilities in the country.

**Kyodo Press**, December 10, 2012

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121210p2g00m0dm078000c.html>

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## **NRA queried over active fault beneath Tsuruga nuclear plant**

Japan Atomic Power Co. sent an open letter of inquiry to the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) on Dec. 11, asking it to clarify the scientific basis for its conclusion that it is highly possible that a fault running underneath a reactor at JAPC's Tsuruga nuclear plant in Fukui Prefecture is in fact active.

Arguing that NRA did not provide sufficient scientific explanations about its assessment of a fault running right beneath the No. 2 reactor at the Tsuruga nuclear power station, JAPC submitted the open letter to NRA in which the power company asked the nuclear regulator to answer its questions in writing.

JAPC Vice President Hiroshi Masuda visited the nuclear regulatory agency, which serves as NRA's secretariat, and handed the open letter to Deputy Director-General Tetsuo Nayuki.

The open letter contained 10 questions, including those about the basis for which NRA judged that the "Urasoko" fault, which runs on the plant's premises, had moved simultaneously with a fault zone

of crushed rock called D-1, which runs right underneath the plant's No. 2 reactor, and about how the regulatory authority simulated that the Urasoko fault had moved in tandem with D-1.

The power company also asked why NRA had drawn the conclusion before JAPC conducts an additional survey. In the open letter, JAPC called on NRA to make a fresh judgment after examining overall assessments of the results of the additional survey to be conducted later by the power firm.

After submitting the open letter, JAPC Vice President Masuda said at a news conference in Tokyo, "I think they will sincerely answer our questions." Asked about the envisaged impact on corporate management of the possibility of the company being forced to decommission the nuclear facility for safety reasons, he only said, "That's hypothetical. I decline to comment."

The reason why JAPC adopted a rather confrontational approach to NRA is that if it is forced to decommission the Tsuruga plant's No. 2 reactor, which has been running for less than 30 years since it was first put into operation, it could be crushed by huge debt stemming from disposition of losses and lose the foundation of its very survival.

There is no provision in the current Nuclear Reactor Regulation Law for procedures for decommissioning nuclear power plants. Therefore, not only the power industry but also the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry were taken by surprise by NRA's decision on the Tsuruga plant. Complaining about NRA's decision, people concerned said that at the very least they would need to put off the inevitable.

*Mainichi Shimbun*, December 12, 2012

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121212p2a00m0na005000c.html>

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## **Mistakes found in all radiation projections**

The Nuclear Regulation Authority said Thursday a thorough review of its mistake-plagued projections for the spread of radiation turned up errors in the data for every atomic power plant in Japan.

The regulatory body examined the data in detail to ensure there would be no more mistakes in the projections. Local governments are expected to use the information to craft plans to prepare for nuclear disasters.

The NRA said there were significant changes in diagrams for how radiation could spread in the event of crises at Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Genkai and Sendai power plants and Hokkaido Electric Power Co.'s Tomari nuclear complex, compared with the previously revised projections released Oct. 29.

The three projections had to be revised either because the plant operators supplied erroneous weather information or because the data were incorrectly processed by the Japan Nuclear Energy Safety Organization, which was tasked with creating the projections.

The process of calculating the projections for the remaining 14 plants across the country, including disaster-hit Fukushima No. 1 operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co., also contained errors or was mishandled, although this did not result in drastic changes in the projections, according to the NRA's secretariat.



The simulation showed the distances at which doses could reach 100 millisieverts a week after a severe crisis like last year's three meltdowns at Fukushima No. 1. At that dose level, evacuation is recommended by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The latest projections show the most distant point where such severe radiation could spread is 40.1 km east of Tepco's Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in Niigata Prefecture. That point is in the city of Nagaoka.

In the earlier projections, the NRA said the most distant point would still be in Nagaoka, but 40.2 km from Tepco's facility, the largest nuclear plant in the world.

**Kyodo Press**, December 14, 2012

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121214a1.html>

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### **Another suit filed to halt reactors at Kepco's over Oi nuclear plant**

FUKUI - A lawsuit was filed Friday by 154 people in Fukui and other prefectures seeking to shut down the only nuclear reactors now in operation in Japan, at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s power plant in Oi, Fukui Prefecture, contending Kepco had the two units restarted before their safety was guaranteed.

The complaint filed with the Fukui District Court said the Fukushima No. 1 triple-meltdown catastrophe that started last year had demonstrated the "totally unacceptable risks of nuclear power plants."

The suit was filed a day after around 1,100 people in 17 prefectures pressed a similar complaint against Kepco and the central government, also seeking to have the Oi plant reactors halted.

The 154 plaintiffs in the latest action, from 19 prefectures, argued that the nuclear plant should be halted immediately while studies are under way into faults running under and near the complex that, if determined to be active, could require the complex to be permanently shut down.

They pointed out that experts are still divided over whether faults believed to be running underneath the Oi plant are active.

The plaintiffs claimed there is a strong possibility of an active fault that would make the plant vulnerable in the event of a major earthquake or tsunami, such as what led to the Fukushima No. 1 calamity.

They also said the Fukushima disaster triggered by the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami had shown the inadequateness of conventional safety standards and that any approval of reactor operations based on those standards is now invalid.

All of the nation's 50 operable reactors had eventually gone offline after the Fukushima crisis started and disaster-resistance stress tests were imposed before any could be restarted. The two reactors at the four-reactor Oi plant were restarted in July, after they apparently cleared initial safety hurdles, but also amid strong warnings that summer blackouts were possible in Kepco's service area if the units remained idled.



The complaint said the prospect of a power shortage, as cited as justification for restarting the Oi reactors, had proved wrong as electricity supply would have been sufficient in July and August without their output.

By prefecture, Fukui hosts the most reactors, at 14.

**Kyodo Press**, December 1, 2012

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121201b4.html>

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