

# Japan nuclear policy: Abe, LDP, Brazil, Japan, Monju, Tsuruga, protests...

Sunday 30 June 2013, by [Kyodo News](#), [Mainichi Shimbun](#) (Date first published: 15 June 2013).

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## **Momentum builds for LDP to push for nuclear reactor reactivation to back 'Abenomics'**

Momentum is building quickly for the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to press for reactivating nuclear reactors that were shut down following the outbreak of the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant in a move to throw its weight behind Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's economic policy mix, dubbed "Abenomics."

In its draft "growth strategy," the government says it will "utilize nuclear reactors whose safety has been confirmed." A majority of lawmakers within the LDP have voiced support for measures to place priority on stable energy supply in a bid to prop up "Abenomics." On the backdrop of Abe's penchant for reactivation of nuclear reactors and mounting concerns among local governments hosting nuclear plants over the cooling of their local economies, momentum is building quickly for the LDP to seek reactivation of nuclear reactors.

"The Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) has been making demands one after another, but this legislators' group needs to discuss whether such demands are necessary from a scientific viewpoint," Hiroyuki Hosoda, executive acting secretary general of the LDP, told a meeting on June 5 of the LDP legislators' group that advocates for the promotion of a stable power supply.

The LDP legislators' group was launched with about 90 members on May 14. It is a core group that pushes for reactivation of nuclear reactors. It is comprised of many veteran lawmakers from those prefectures that host nuclear power stations, including Hosoda from the Shimane No. 1 district and former LDP Vice President Tadamori Oshima from the Aomori No. 3 district.

During the ordinary Diet session last year, the LDP, which was in the opposition camp at the time, criticized the then ruling Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) for its handling of the Fukushima nuclear disaster and took the lead in debate in favor of establishing a nuclear regulatory body with a high degree of independence. In its election manifesto for last year's House of Representatives election, the LDP said, "We will place top priority on the NRA's decisions and decide on whether to reactivate nuclear reactors within three years." Although LDP lawmakers are deeply dissatisfied with the NRA over its refusal to soften its harsh stance toward power companies, they would have to respect new regulatory standards due to take effect in July.

On the other hand, the LDP is concerned about the likelihood that it will take a long time to reactivate nuclear reactors after applications are filed as the NRA is likely to evaluate the applications very carefully.

Tsuyoshi Takagi, LDP lower house lawmaker, became increasingly frustrated and said, "It is unfortunate if no decision is made and reactors remain abandoned." The LDP, therefore, plans to press the government to improve the NRA's way of evaluating applications for reactivation of nuclear reactors before the current Diet session ends on June 26.

The LDP has come increasingly forward to press for reactivation of nuclear reactors as it said in its draft election promises for the upcoming House of Councillors election that "the government will take responsibility for reactivating nuclear reactors" while taking heed of its manifesto for last year's lower house election.

On the government's draft "growth strategy," a senior member of the LDP legislators' group expressed its intention to press the government even harder through the LDP Policy Research Council to reactivate nuclear reactors, saying, "There are only a few references to reactivation of nuclear reactors. The issue must be placed in a firm position."

*Mainichi Shimbun*, June 06, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130606p2a00m0na012000c.html>

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## **Abe to pledge nuclear plant restart in growth strategy**

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will clarify his government's plan to resume operation of idled nuclear power plants in a growth strategy to be compiled in mid-June, sources familiar with the matter said Saturday.

The draft energy policy to be included in the growth strategy states that steps will be taken to restart reactors judged safe for operation by the nuclear regulatory authorities, they said.

The government will pledge that it will make utmost efforts to ensure plant safety to gain support from municipalities hosting nuclear plants, the sources said.

The energy policy laid out in the growth strategy will be the government's official endorsement of Abe's plan to rely on nuclear power until the nation's final policy is made on nuclear energy use.

The draft policy says use of nuclear power plants is needed for the country's stable power supply, and the government will complete the separation of electric power companies' electricity generation and distribution operations by 2020, the sources said.

**Kyodo Press**, May 26, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130526p2g00m0dm050000c.html>

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## **LDP lawmakers form group to push for restart of nuclear reactors**

Dozens of lawmakers in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party launched a group Tuesday to push for the restart of the country's idled nuclear reactors, saying a stable power supply is key to achieving economic growth.

This is a Diet members' league to map out the importance of nuclear power, Tsuyoshi Takagi, one of the lawmakers who organized the move, told reporters, though acknowledging the strong public opposition to atomic power since the 2011 start of the Fukushima No. 1 plant's triple-meltdown disaster, which prompted massive evacuations as well as widespread fallout and contamination and areas still uninhabitable.

The group, led by former Chief Cabinet Secretary Hiroyuki Hosoda, plans to compile a proposal by the time the Diet session ends in June after studying what safety measures were taken at nuclear plants and the situation of areas where such facilities exist. Communities hosting nuclear power complexes have come out to say they fear their economic lifeline will be in jeopardy if most of the nation's reactors remain idled.

The Tuesday meeting was attended by about 45 House of Representatives and House of Councilors members, according to Takagi.

The latest move came as the Nuclear Regulation Authority prepares to introduce new safety regulations for commercial reactors in July.

Once the regulations come into force, utilities are expected to start applying for the NRA safety assessments that they need to clear in order to restart operations.

The LDP is also currently compiling policy pledges ahead of the July Upper House election that sources have said will stipulate the need to restart reactors that are confirmed to be safe.

**Kyodo News**, May 15, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/05/15/national/ldp-lawmakers-form-group-to-push-for-restart-of-nuclear-reactors/#.UZq4Cdiz640>

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## **70% of nuclear experts still 'comfortable' with atomic power: survey**

Some 70 percent of nuclear energy experts with the Atomic Energy Society of Japan (AESJ) remain “comfortable” with atomic power, while at the same time public confidence in the technology remains low, a society survey has revealed.

The AESJ began the annual survey of its members in fiscal 2006, and of the general public in fiscal 2007. The fiscal 2012 survey, conducted in January and February this year, queried 500 randomly selected residents of the Tokyo region and 559 AESJ members at universities and in the private sector.

In the fiscal 2010 survey, 86.5 percent of AESJ members queried said they were either “comfortable” or “somewhat comfortable” with atomic power generation. In the fiscal 2011 survey — conducted after the March 2011 Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant meltdowns — that figure dropped to 62 percent, but bounced back to 69.2 percent for fiscal 2012.

Meanwhile, only about 25 percent of the 500 members of the public agreed or somewhat agreed that Japan should keep using atomic power — around the same rate as in the 2011 survey and half that of before the Fukushima nuclear disaster. Asked if Japan should keep using atomic power, some 92 percent of AESJ members said yes — 6.6 points higher than in the fiscal 2011 survey and close to the pre-disaster level of around 95 percent.

“The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) included continuing atomic power in their election promises last year and won a huge victory, so I think nuclear experts might have regained some of their confidence in the technology,” Kansai University professor of social psychology Shoji Tsuchida said of the survey results. “But it would be a mistake for them to think that the election results mean the public has signed off on nuclear energy.”

*Mainichi Shimbun*, May 08, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130508p2a00m0na007000c.html>

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## **Japan, Brazil likely to agree to resume talks on nuclear development**

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Japan and Brazil will likely agree to resume talks on a civil nuclear cooperation pact at a summit meeting next week, a Japanese government source said Thursday, paving the way for Japanese companies to export atomic power generation technology and equipment.

The agreement is expected to come when Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff meet next Thursday in Tokyo to discuss enhancing bilateral economic ties, according to the source.

With two nuclear power plants currently online, Brazil is hoping to increase the number and shift its focus from hydropower to nuclear energy.

Japan and Brazil began talks in January 2011 with an eye to signing a civil nuclear cooperation pact for the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

The talks, however, have been stalled since the nuclear crisis in Fukushima Prefecture, triggered by the devastating earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

A civil nuclear cooperation pact sets a legal framework for the peaceful use and transfer of atomic-power technologies and equipment as well as nuclear materials to ensure nonproliferation.

Abe hopes to boost exports of nuclear power technologies and equipment as one of the key areas in Japan's growth strategy.

In May, Japan signed civil nuclear power cooperation pacts with the United Arab Emirates and Turkey, and agreed to accelerate talks on such an accord with India.

Japan agreed on Sunday to deepen cooperation in the field of nuclear power with the so-called Visegrad Group of Eastern European nations — Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia.

**Kyodo News**, June 20, 2013

\* <http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130620p2g00m0dm080000c.html>

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## **Japan looks to resume nuclear energy talks with India**

Japan is considering resuming talks with India on bilateral cooperation in nuclear energy, the government's top spokesman said Monday.

"We have judged it sensible to negotiate an accord with India on nuclear cooperation," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told reporters.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is expected to promote exports of nuclear power plants to India under the accord when he meets Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on May 29 in Tokyo, sources close to the matter said.

The talks come amid widespread concern in Japan about the safety of nuclear power in light of the core meltdowns that took place at the poorly protected Fukushima No. 1 power plant when the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami hit.

Talks between the two countries were launched in 2010 but have been suspended since the disaster.

The Indian side has “expressed strong hope for a nuclear agreement with Japan even after the nuclear accident,” Suga said. “As a country having experienced a disaster, (Japan) is responsible for contributing to the improved safety of atomic energy by sharing knowledge and lessons with the world.”

As part of his strategy to boost the struggling economy, Abe is trying to promote exports of atomic and other infrastructure to the developing world.

Earlier this month, Japan concluded nuclear accords with the United Arab Emirates and Turkey during Abe’s visits there.

**Kyodo News**, May 21, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/05/21/national/japan-looks-to-resume-nuclear-energy-talks-with-india/#.UaLGM9iz640>

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### **Almost 60% of public opposes Japan’s export of nuclear tech: survey**

Nearly 60 percent of the public oppose the government’s move to promote the export of Japan’s nuclear technologies and expertise, a new opinion poll has revealed.

Some 58.3 percent of respondents disapproved of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s nuclear export policy, against 24.0 percent who declared themselves in favor, according to the survey conducted by Jiji Press.

At a meeting in Tokyo on June 7, Abe agreed with French President Francois Hollande to cooperate in expanding sales of nuclear power plant equipment and technologies to other countries.

But the survey found that concerns about the safety of atomic energy remain strong among the public, more than two years after the March 2011 meltdowns struck the Fukushima No. 1 power station.

Even among supporters of Abe’s ruling Liberal Democratic Party, those opposed to the policy exceeded those who backed it by 43.2 percent to 40.4 percent, the findings showed.

Among backers of the Democratic Party of Japan, the largest opposition force in the Diet, 76.1 percent said they are against the move by Abe’s government. And 50.0 percent of supporters of Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Restoration Party) said they opposed the policy, exceeding the 45.5 percent who backed it.

The four-day survey was conducted through Monday on 2,000 adults nationwide and received 1,304 valid responses.

**Jiji Press**, June 16, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/06/16/national/almost-60-of-public-opposes-japans-export-of-nuclear-tech-survey/#.UcEF0dhjbRY>

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## **REGULATIONS**

### **Regulators officially decide new safety requirements for reactors**

TOKYO (Kyodo) — The Nuclear Regulation Authority on Wednesday officially decided on Japan's new safety requirements for reactors aimed at preventing recurrences of disasters like the one at the Fukushima Daiichi complex in 2011.

The new regulations are expected to take effect on July 8, paving the way for nuclear power plant operators to apply for the NRA's safety assessment as a step toward resuming the operation of their idled reactors.

While calling the regulations a "culmination" of discussions that have taken place since October last year, NRA commissioners acknowledged that the rules' application is a more important job for them and vowed to make efforts to further improve them.

"I think we have created a system that can be regarded as quite proper internationally. But its real value will be questioned during the screening process," NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka told Wednesday's meeting to discuss the issue.

Four major utilities are likely to file for safety screening for a maximum of 12 reactors at six plants as early as July, although it is unclear how long the process will take. Senior NRA officials said earlier it may take at least six months.

Under the new requirements, utilities will for the first time be obliged to put in place specific countermeasures against possible severe accidents like reactor core meltdowns, as well as against huge tsunami — the direct cause of the Fukushima crisis.

Before the crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi plant, triggered by a huge earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, authorities had left it up to utilities whether to take steps against severe accidents, based on the assumption such disasters were extremely unlikely.

Utilities will now be required to equip reactors with filtered venting systems so that radioactive substances will be reduced when gas and steam need to be released to prevent damage to containment vessels, while preparing emergency control rooms to guard reactor operations against any act of terrorism or natural disasters.

The NRA will also require the operators to make a stricter assessment of whether geological faults running underneath nuclear power plants are active and make sure that key facilities are designed to withstand the largest tsunami estimated to hit the sites, such as by installing seawalls.

The NRA, which was launched in September last year, has been devising the new regulations to replace the current ones that proved insufficient in the wake of the world's worst nuclear crisis since the 1986 Chernobyl disaster.

The legal deadline for enacting the new safety criteria is July 18, but the power industry, which is

struggling amid soaring fuel costs to boost nonnuclear thermal power generation, has been calling for earlier implementation so that utilities can start the procedure for restarting reactors as quickly as possible.

Of the 50 commercial reactors in Japan, only two in western Japan are currently online.

The four utilities seeking to swiftly apply for the NRA's safety screening are Hokkaido Electric Power Co., Kansai Electric Power Co., Shikoku Electric Power Co. and Kyushu Electric Power Co.

"We hope the NRA will promptly conduct safety screenings in an efficient way to address power shortages," an official of Kansai Electric Power, servicing an area centering on Osaka, said.

**Kyodo News**, June 19, 2013

\* <http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130619p2g00m0dm083000c.html>

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## **NRA eyes allowing Japan's two operating reactors to remain online through September**

The two nuclear reactors currently in operation in Japan have no serious safety problems in light of new regulations taking effect in July, regulators said in a draft assessment report released Thursday.

The assessment, if finalized by the Nuclear Regulation Authority, will enable reactors 3 and 4 at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Oi plant in Fukui Prefecture to remain online through September, when they will be taken offline for mandatory routine checks.

"As of the end of June, we think . . . the situation will not create serious safety problems immediately," the NRA said in the report, which evaluated the current status of the reactors.

But the NRA noted that some requirements have not been fully satisfied and criticized Kepeco for its attitude in exchanges with the regulators during the latest assessment process.

"There were some areas in which Kansai Electric proposed countermeasures bit by bit as if to find the minimum possible standard. Such an approach is likely to be an obstacle in efficiently proceeding with (reactor safety) assessments once the new regulations are implemented," the report said.

Reactors that are currently offline will have to be checked by the NRA to determine whether they meet the new safety regulations and can be restarted. The NRA is expected to start accepting applications for the safety screening from July 8.

But the NRA decided to conduct a special assessment on the safety of the Oi plant's reactors 3 and 4 before the regulations take effect, given that they are the only operating reactors in Japan out of a total of 50.

The new regulations, which reflect the lessons learned from the 2011 Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant disaster, require utilities to take specific measures to protect their atomic plants from tsunami and to prevent and minimize the consequences of severe crises, such as meltdowns.



As for emergency command centers that the utilities must establish to handle severe crises, Kepco decided to use a meeting room next to a central control room for reactors 1 and 2 at the Oi plant.

The NRA acknowledged in the draft report that the room is big enough to house supervisors who would be expected to stay there, but also urged the utility to quickly finish construction of a seismically isolated building to further improve safety.

**Kyodo News**, June 20, 2013

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<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/06/20/national/nra-eyes-allowing-japans-two-operating-reactors-to-remain-online-through-september/#.UceledhjbRY>

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### **Regulators to issue order effectively banning restart of Monju**

TOKYO (Kyodo) — The Nuclear Regulation Authority on Wednesday officially decided to prohibit the Monju prototype fast-breeder reactor from being put online, dashing the operator's hopes of restarting the facility by the end of next March.

The harsh measure against the Japan Atomic Energy Agency, a national research institute, came in response to slack safety checkups observed in the Monju reactor in Fukui Prefecture, western Japan. A written order will be handed over to the JAEA on Thursday.

The JAEA is in further trouble because of a radiation leak accident at its laboratory northeast of Tokyo on Thursday that resulted in 33 out of the 55 people there being exposed to radiation.

During a meeting of the NRA commissioners on Wednesday, Chairman Shunichi Tanaka highlighted the fact that a radiation protection supervisor allowed radioactive substances to be released into the atmosphere via a ventilation fan in a laboratory building where contamination was confirmed.

The JAEA also waited more than 24 hours before reporting the accident to the state, saying that it had underestimated the seriousness of the incident.

In regard to the operation of Monju, the JAEA will be barred from engaging in preparatory work for resuming the reactor until it rebuilds a maintenance and management system for the facility.

The delay in restarting Monju could affect Japan's nuclear fuel recycling policy, which aims at reprocessing spent nuclear fuel and reusing the extracted plutonium and uranium as reactor fuel.

Japan has been hoping the Monju project would play a key role in the fuel recycling flow, having spent more than 1 trillion yen on its maintenance and construction. But the reactor has remained largely offline since first achieving criticality in 1994, due to a leakage of sodium coolant and other subsequent problems.

The JAEA has also been found to have failed to conduct inspections at appropriate intervals on nearly 10,000 devices, including those that are categorized as important for safety, leading the NRA to take the latest move.

The NRA also said Wednesday that it will start from June a process to assess whether geologic faults at the premises of the Monju facility are active. The NRA is conducting or plans to conduct similar

assessments on a total of six facilities nationwide.

**Kyodo News**, May 29, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130529p2g00m0dm078000c.html>

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## MONJU

### Monju operator skipped inspections of another 2,300 devices

FUKUI, Japan (Kyodo) — The operator of the Monju prototype fast-breeder nuclear reactor said Friday it had skipped inspections of another 2,300 pieces of equipment, in the latest sign of its lax safety management.

The Japan Atomic Energy Agency was already found to have failed to conduct inspections at appropriate intervals on nearly 10,000 devices, leading nuclear regulators to issue an order in late May effectively prohibiting the Monju reactor from restarting until steps are taken to prevent a recurrence.

The JAEA, a national research institute, reported the latest blunders during a safety inspection carried out by the Nuclear Regulation Authority between June 3 and Friday.

Japan has already spent over 1 trillion yen on the Monju project, hoping the facility would play a key role in the country's spent fuel recycling policy.

But the reactor has remained largely offline since first achieving criticality in 1994, due to a sodium coolant leak and other subsequent problems.

Even after being barred from engaging in preparatory work for restarting the reactor, the JAEA announced earlier this month that it had temporarily failed to keep heat in the sodium of the secondary heat transfer system when checking a power supply system.

**Kyodo News**, June 22, 2013

\* <http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130622p2g00m0dm004000c.html>

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### Nuclear watchdog to officially prohibit restart of Monju

TOKYO (Kyodo) — The Nuclear Regulation Authority will officially decide May 29 to issue an order effectively prohibiting a restart of the idled Monju prototype fast-breeder nuclear reactor due to a series of problems with safety management, sources close to the authority said Wednesday.

The Japan Atomic Energy Agency, which operates the Monju reactor, told the NRA on Wednesday in a statement that it will not oppose the authority's decision as it "takes the NRA's judgment

seriously” and pledges to improve its safety management “as soon as possible.”

Under the order, the JAEA, which had aimed to resume the Monju operations by the end of next March, will be barred from engaging in preparatory work for the restart until it rebuilds its maintenance and management system for the facility.

On May 15, the NRA said the JAEA “cannot sufficiently secure the safety of Monju,” referring to a delay in planned checkups of a wide range of equipment at the reactor reported last November, and subsequent blunders.

The JAEA has been found to have failed to conduct inspections at appropriate intervals on nearly 10,000 devices at Monju, including those categorized as important for safety.

The NRA looked into the case in detail and determined the agency’s “safety culture is deteriorating,” given that the agency could not address the problems even though people had been aware of the delayed inspections.

JAEA President Atsuyuki Suzuki has stepped down to take responsibility over the matter.

The Monju reactor has remained largely offline since first achieving criticality in 1994, due to a leakage of sodium coolant and other subsequent problems.

**Kyodo News**, May 23, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130523p2g00m0dm040000c.html>

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## **Nuclear watchdog to effectively ban Monju from restarting**

TOKYO (Kyodo) — The Nuclear Regulation Authority decided Wednesday to issue an order effectively prohibiting the Monju prototype fast-breeder nuclear reactor from restarting, noting a series of problems with safety management.

“The Japan Atomic Energy Agency cannot sufficiently secure the safety of Monju,” the NRA said in a document, referring to a delay in planned checkups of a wide range of equipment at Monju, reported last November, and subsequent blunders.

“We see deterioration in its safety culture,” it said.

Under the order, expected later this month after necessary procedures are taken, the JAEA will be barred from engaging in preparatory work for resuming Monju operations until it rebuilds its maintenance and management system for the facility.

A senior NRA official said the order will likely be in place at least until around January next year because the JAEA is not expected to finish inspecting the equipment by that time.

The development is another blow to the Monju reactor, which has remained offline for most of the past 20 years or so due to troubles. Japan has been hoping the facility would play a key role in the country’s nuclear fuel recycling process.

The Monju reactor first achieved criticality in 1994 but was shut down due to a serious accident involving a leak of sodium coolant and a resulting fire in 1995.

It resumed operations in May 2010, but the launch of full operations was delayed again after a device in the reactor fell inside the vessel in August that year.

In November 2012, the JAEA said it skipped necessary procedures upon delaying the inspections of nearly 10,000 devices, including those that are categorized as important for safety. A report submitted by the JAEA on the issue in January this year also included mistakes.

**Kyodo News**, May 15, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130515p2g00m0dm062000c.html>

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## **Nuclear authority not to allow restart of Monju reactor**

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority is considering not allowing the operator of the prototype fast-breeder nuclear reactor Monju to resume operations before its sloppy safety management is improved, sources close to the matter said Monday.

The expected order, coming after revelations last year that regular safety checks had been skipped, would require the Japan Atomic Energy Agency, the operator of the 280,000-kilowatt reactor in Tsuruga, Fukui Prefecture, to change its maintenance rules and inspection plans, according to the sources.

Although details still need to be worked out, under the agency's order the operator would not be able to replace nuclear fuel or move control rods — important work toward restarting the reactor, which has been offline since an accident in August 2010.

The operator was found last November to have failed to conduct periodical safety checks on nearly 10,000 out of 39,000 pieces of equipment at the plant by the deadlines.

The Monju reactor first reached criticality in 1994 but was shut down in 1995 due to an accident. Regarded as key to realizing Japan's nuclear fuel cycle in which spent nuclear fuel from power plants is reprocessed for reuse as plutonium-uranium mixed oxide, or MOX, its restart in 2010, after 14 and a half years, hit a snag within a few months.

**Kyodo News**, May 13, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130513p2g00m0dm075000c.html>

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## **NUCLEAR PLANTS**

## **TEPCO mulls putting off application to restart Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuke plant**

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) is mulling putting off its application for safety screening of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata Prefecture until a plan to restart the plant gains local approval, it has been learned.

TEPCO started considering the postponement of its application with the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) on June 17, despite the utility's earlier plans to file the application for safety equipment screening even without approval from Niigata Prefecture. With the implementation of the new regulatory standards for nuclear plant safety set for early July, multiple power companies are expected to file screening applications with the NRA for resumption of their nuclear plants.

While TEPCO's turnaround is apparently aimed at avoiding fueling prefectural opposition through a hasty decision, the utility — the operator of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant — is highly likely to miss out on a chance to join the first batch of applicants for NRA screenings, which possibly include Kansai Electric Power Co. and Shikoku Electric Power Co.

For a power company to restart a nuclear plant, it needs to gain approval from local municipalities based on their safety accord after passing NRA screening on whether the facility conforms to the new standards. Previously, TEPCO had considered applying for safety screening right after the July implementation of the new standards while gaining local approval concurrently. Foundation work has already been under way to install filtered vent systems at the plant's No. 1 and No. 7 reactors — a necessary step to restart the facility.

Niigata Gov. Hirohiko Izumida, however, has voiced opposition to the plan, saying, "Verifications of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster should come first." On June 12, the governor insisted that TEPCO needs to gain prior approval from the prefecture and other entities to install the vent systems, saying, "Even though (filtered) vents are intended to reduce radioactive material emissions, they are inherently designed to emit such materials outside. There's no way the utility can win our trust without explaining how it is going to operate them."

Under the new standards, utilities can apply for safety screenings even if vent systems are not installed in time, as long as they are planning to install them. However, the Niigata Prefectural Government is certain to fiercely oppose such applications. If that is the case, a plan to restart the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa complex would further be delayed, prompting TEPCO to procrastinate its application with the NRA until it is expected to gain prior approval from the prefecture.

In its rehabilitation plan, TEPCO had envisaged improving its earnings by reactivating the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant as early as the start of fiscal 2013. Now that the utility is uncertain when to apply for safety screenings, its promise to financial institutions to turn itself profitable this fiscal year may need to be reviewed. While TEPCO raised electricity rates in September last year, the utility is likely to be forced to decide whether to further raise the rates to improve its earnings.

Since there is a limited capacity to NRA's screenings, a delay in applying for safety screenings means a further delay in restarting a nuclear plant.

*Mainichi Shimbun*, June 17, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130617p2a00m0na013000c.html>

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## **Kepeco's MOX load to arrive June 27**

OSAKA — Two ships carrying uranium-plutonium oxide fuel for the Takahama nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture, will arrive on June 27 - the first batch of MOX to be sent to Japan since the Fukushima disaster in March 2011.

The controversial fuel is destined for reactor 3 at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Takahama plant. But with the reactors still idle and stricter safety regulations taking effect next month, it's unclear how long the fuel might sit in storage. The Nuclear Regulation Authority still has to clear the plant before it can be restarted.

The U.K.-registered Pacific Heron and Pacific Egret left France in mid-April with 20 MOX fuel assemblies. While Kepeco and French nuclear firm Areva SA, which made the fuel, have not released figures, Greenpeace estimates the two ships are carrying about 10 tons of MOX, which is made with weapons-grade plutonium.

Kepeco hopes to restart the units 3 and 4 after new regulatory standards take effect next month. The utility has said it won't restart them without approval from Fukui Gov. Issei Nishikawa, although it is not legally necessary.

That is not expected to be a huge political problem. Nishikawa is strongly pro-nuclear, but he has also said his judgment on giving the green light to restart reactor 3 and its new MOX fuel load will be based on the new regulatory standards.

For Takahama, the arrival of the MOX is seen as a critical step to economic recovery. About ¥4 billion, or nearly 55 percent of Takahama's fiscal 2013 budget, comes from nuclear-related subsidies provided by the central government. In past years, over 60 percent of its budget has come from such subsidies.

Over 40 local firms have contracts at the town's four nuclear power plants for a variety of goods and services. During regular inspections, which occur roughly once every 13 months, up to 2,500 of Takahama's 11,000 residents have been hired to help the inspectors, and the secondary economic impact on local stores and hotels, with their guests from Kepeco and the central government, is huge.

Takahama estimates keeping just one reactor idle will cause an annual revenue loss of ¥500 million in subsidies and secondary economic benefits.

**Eric Johnston**, *Japan Times* Staff Writer, June 18, 2013

[http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/06/18/national/kepcos-mox-load-to-arrive-june-27/#.UcENFt\\_hjbRY](http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/06/18/national/kepcos-mox-load-to-arrive-june-27/#.UcENFt_hjbRY)

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## **Kyushu Electric spends 10 billion yen a year to maintain idle nuclear reactors**

Kyushu Electric Power Co. is continuing to spend around 10 billion yen a year to maintain the idle No. 1 and 2 reactors at the Genkai Nuclear Power Plant in Genkai, Saga Prefecture, it has been learned, even as a potential 40-year operation limit for the No. 1 reactor looms.

Multiple company executives said that they are “not thinking at all” of decommissioning the No. 1 reactor, although it will hit the 40-year-limit defined in the revised Nuclear Reactor Regulation Law in October 2015. The Nuclear Regulation Authority can grant exceptional extensions of 20 years, and company executives, who hold a strong view that nuclear power will continue to be a more cost-effective electricity source than thermal power, are hoping to be granted that exception.

According to Kyushu Electric, the price of thermal power is over 11 yen per kilowatt-hour, while the price of nuclear power is around 7.5 yen per kilowatt-hour. Even adding in the costs to meet new nuclear safety standards, the price of nuclear power would only rise about 1 yen per kilowatt-hour, so it would still be cheaper than thermal power.

Kyushu Electric also cites the problem of the cost of decommissioning the reactor. In accordance with the Electricity Business Act, the utility is setting aside funds to decommission the reactor, but at the end of fiscal 2015 it will still be 3.6 billion yen short of the estimated 35.8 billion yen needed to decommission the No. 1 reactor.

“People are telling us to dismantle the reactor, but that would be difficult if we don’t receive financial assistance,” says Kyushu Electric President Michiaki Uriu.

On the other hand, bringing the old reactor in line with new safety standards would require massive investments which would go to waste if it was decommissioned upon reaching the 40-year limit. Still, it seems that Kyushu Electric officials would prefer to postpone a decision on the reactor’s fate for now, even if it means expending maintenance fees, until they know whether they will be able to receive an extension for the reactor and whether it will be profitable after bringing it in line with the new safety standards.

The company’s consolidated balance sheet at the end of last fiscal year showed it was 332.47 billion yen in the red, its largest deficit ever. Normally, it would not be able to afford to spend 10 billion yen a year maintaining offline reactors.

“The reason they can spend large amounts of money on an inactive facility is that the current system allows them to collect power bill income to cover expenses (such as reactor maintenance) that are deemed as prime costs,” says Ritsumeikan University professor of environmental economics Kenichi Oshima.

Regarding Kyushu Electric’s argument for nuclear power’s cost-effectiveness, Oshima raised his doubts. “Currently there is no assurance of what degree of safety measures would have to be taken at the No. 1 reactor to earn an extension, so they can’t calculate the cost-effectiveness. When you also consider the costs for compensation and disaster response in the case of a nuclear disaster, you cannot call nuclear power more cost-effective than thermal power,” he said.

The No. 1 reactor emerged as a problem after it was learned that its pressure vessel was in worse condition than expected. Last year, the Nuclear Regulation Authority’s previous incarnation, the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, said the reactor would be operational until 2033. However, the cause of the pressure vessel’s deterioration remains unknown, and there is a strong opinion among experts that a non-biased research institute should analyze it. Even Hideo Kishimoto, the

mayor of the town of Genkai, which hosts the plant, has expressed concern over the 20-year extension, though he is strongly calling for its reactivation.

*Mainichi Shimbun*, June 11, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130611p2a00m0na007000c.html>

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## **Nuclear regulators acknowledge fault below Tsuruga reactor is active**

TOKYO (Kyodo) — The Nuclear Regulation Authority accepted on Wednesday an assessment that a reactor at the Tsuruga plant in western Japan is sitting above an active fault, making it increasingly difficult for the facility to resume operation.

It is the first time Japan's regulatory authorities have acknowledged an existing reactor is located above a fault feared to move in the future, according to an NRA official. The judgment may leave plant operator Japan Atomic Power Co. with no option but to scrap the No. 2 reactor.

The NRA also decided to request that Japan Atomic Power study how the spent fuel pool inside the No. 2 reactor building would be affected in the event the fault moves.

Most of Japan's nuclear reactors are currently offline in the wake of the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi complex disaster, and they are required to undergo the NRA's safety assessment process to check whether they satisfy the new regulatory requirements to be introduced in July before they can resume operations.

In a press conference held later in the day, NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka acknowledged that the No. 2 reactor at the two-unit Tsuruga plant in Fukui Prefecture would face increasing difficulties to clear the NRA's safety review.

But he refused to make a clear statement on how the NRA will respond to Japan Atomic Power's application for a safety review, saying, "We do not deny that the conclusion (on the fault assessment) may change if new data show up. So I think I should not say anything decisive at this stage."

The panel, consisting of NRA commissioner Kunihiro Shimazaki and four outside experts, concluded last week that a zone of rock fragments called D-1, running directly beneath the No. 2 reactor, is an active fault, rejecting Japan Atomic Power's objections.

The panel also said the D-1 fault could move together with a confirmed major active fault called Urazoko, which is located about 200 to 300 meters from the No. 1 and 2 reactor buildings, and may affect facilities located above.

In quake-prone Japan, nuclear power plant operators are not permitted to build reactors and other important safety facilities directly above active faults — currently defined as those that have moved in the last 120,000 to 130,000 years.

Responding to the latest development, Japan Atomic Power expressed criticism in a statement that it was "extremely inappropriate" that the NRA approved the panel's report without studying in detail the course of discussions.



The company also said that the NRA should discuss the issue again after seeing the outcome of its investigation at the plant, which is expected to continue by the end of June.

Major utilities holding a stake in Japan Atomic Power are closely watching how the issue unfolds, fearing the company may fall into negative net worth if it has to scrap the No. 2 unit because of a shortage of decommissioning funds and loss in asset value.

The company has set aside money for future decommissioning costs on the assumption the No. 2 reactor will operate for 40 years, but it has been operating commercially for only 26 years.

Restarting Japan Atomic Power's two other reactors is also unlikely to be easy, with the No. 1 unit at the Tsuruga plant known to be aging and a reactor at the Tokai No. 2 plant in Ibaraki Prefecture, eastern Japan, facing local opposition.

Japan Atomic Power is currently surviving on revenues such as basic fees from major utilities that have contracts to receive electricity.

But the utilities may not be able to offer support forever because they are also struggling amid increased fuel costs for thermal power generation to make up for the loss of nuclear power.

**Kyodo News**, May 22, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130522p2g00m0dm084000c.html>

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## **Panel concludes Tsuruga nuclear reactor located above active fault**

TOKYO (Kyodo) — A panel of experts appointed by the Nuclear Regulation Authority concluded Wednesday that a reactor in western Japan is located above an active fault that could undermine its safety, increasing the likelihood the unit will be permanently shut down.

The determination is expected to lead NRA commissioners to decide that the No. 2 unit at Japan Atomic Power Co.'s Tsuruga plant does not meet the conditions necessary for undergoing a safety assessment, which the country's reactors are required to clear in order to resume operation following the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi complex disaster.

Japan Atomic Power immediately lodged a protest against the panel's decision, saying the report "fundamentally lacks objective facts and data" supporting its conclusion. The company's President Yasuo Hamada also denied there was an immediate need to scrap the No. 2 reactor during a press conference.

The company said it will urge the panel to review its conclusion based on the outcome of an ongoing investigation at the plant, but the company may be left with no option but to scrap the unit unless it collects data disproving the panel's conclusion.

"The conclusion means that the plant's safety level has been low. We can only say that the plant was fortunate as it was able to avoid any accidents up to now," NRA commissioner Kunihiko Shimazaki, who led the panel of five academics, said in wrapping up the discussions.

In quake-prone Japan, nuclear power plant operators are not permitted to build reactors and other

facilities with important safety functions directly above faults that could move in the future.

The panel agreed at its first meeting in December after a field survey that it is likely the No. 2 reactor is located above an active fault, but discussions continued for a further five months after Japan Atomic Power and some ruling Liberal Democratic Party lawmakers accused the panel of not sufficiently listening to the arguments of the plant operator.

While Japan Atomic Power officials have called on the panel to wait until it finishes its additional investigation in June, the panel members moved to compile their assessment Wednesday.

“The panel of experts thinks that a zone of crushed rock called D-1 is an active fault that should be taken into consideration from a quake-resistant design standpoint,” the report said, touching on the findings based on a large-scale trench excavation investigation conducted at the two-unit nuclear complex in Fukui Prefecture. The D-1 fault runs beneath the No. 2 reactor.

It is feared that the D-1 zone moves together with a confirmed major active fault called Urazoko, which is located only about 200-300 meters from the No. 1 and No. 2 reactor buildings, and could affect important facilities located above, the report said.

Japan has been reviewing the activity of fracture zones beneath nuclear facilities following the Fukushima crisis, which was triggered by a huge earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011. The Tsuruga plant is one of six facilities that the NRA has decided to inspect in that regard.

Restarting Japan Atomic Power’s two other reactors is also unlikely to be easy, with the No. 1 unit at the Tsuruga plant known to be an aging reactor and a reactor at the Tokai No. 2 plant in Ibaraki Prefecture facing local opposition.

**Kyodo News**, May 15, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130515p2g00m0dm008000c.html>

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## **Kyoto’s cultural treasures at mercy of Fukui reactors**

KYOTO — Each spring, thousands of tourists visit the ancient capital of Kyoto to enjoy what, for many, is the quintessential Japanese experience of viewing cherry blossoms in the cradle of the nation’s traditional culture.

During this time, as well as when the leaves turn in the autumn and at New Year’s, Kyoto’s 17 World Heritage properties, 207 nationally designated national treasures and more than 1,800 important cultural properties draw huge crowds.

This officially recognized cultural heritage includes ancient temples and shrines, traditional homes and brick buildings erected from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onward, as well as paintings, scrolls, ancient manuscripts and folding screens.

Amid such riches, it’s easy to forget that roughly 60 km from central Kyoto and only about 50 km from such internationally known sites as Kinkakuji (the Golden Pavilion), lies Fukui Prefecture, home to one of the world’s largest concentrations of nuclear power plants. In the event of a severe

accident resulting in substantial amounts of radioactive fallout in the surrounding area, Kyoto faces at least partial evacuation and both the prefecture and the city have put plans in place.

The proximity of Fukui's nuclear power plants to Kyoto Prefecture's 2.6 million residents, including the nearly 1.5 million who live in the city of Kyoto, means priorities are naturally focused on evacuation plans that save the maximum number of lives, especially in the immediate aftermath of a disaster.

But while prefectural and municipal documents show an awareness of the importance of protecting delicate artwork and religious objects in the event of major quakes, fires and floods, none address the question of what - if anything - can be done at an official level to save at least some of Kyoto's cultural treasures from radioactive contamination.

"There has been no official discussion, not even at the national level, about how to protect our cultural properties from contamination after a nuclear power plant accident has occurred. Kyoto Prefecture is concentrating first and foremost on the issue of evacuating residents," said the prefectural government's assistant chief of atomic energy safety, Hideki Takahashi.

"Nor has the city (of Kyoto) had any specific talks with prefectural authorities, the Cultural Affairs Agency or UNESCO about protecting Kyoto's World Heritage sites from radiation," added Tetsuji Nonoguchi, head of the city's nuclear disaster response office.

Many of these World Heritage sites, designated by UNESCO, and numerous important cultural properties are buildings or large objects that can't be moved. Some of the temples and shrines have concrete storage facilities for smaller works of art, old scrolls and manuscripts, and officials say these facilities could offer reasonably secure protection from radioactive contamination.

Kyoto Prefecture's plan in the event of the Fukui plants suffering a critical accident, revised earlier this year, assumes the "calm" evacuation of nearly 130,000 people on the Kyoto side of the border but still within 30 km of the Takahama plant in Fukui. It also assumes that up to 600 buses could be secured to evacuate prefectural residents living in rural areas, and that those nearest the plants fleeing into Kyoto by car would take the most logical routes.

The prefectural government further assumes that around 12,000 evacuees would enter from neighboring Fukui, a figure some Kyoto residents and officials say is far too low.

The prefecture estimates it would take around 15 to 25 hours to evacuate everyone, depending on time of day, weather conditions, number of cars on the main roads, whether or not at least some train services are available and the number of buses that can be dispatched to pick up those living in remote areas.

On the other hand, the Kyoto Municipal Government has plans in place to rescue and protect cultural assets from fire. It involves the city's temples and shrines, police and fire departments, and local volunteers.

The Kyoto Cultural Properties Rescue system consists of 237 teams located throughout the city. Residents living near important cultural properties, as well as those in charge of them, would work together in the event of a natural disaster and can make decisions on whether to remove a property or if possible store it on the premises.

"Most volunteers live close to the cultural property they'll help protect, and disaster drills involving the teams are held twice a year. Area residents, including foreign residents, can participate if they want," said Kenji Kishimoto, a municipal official in charge of cultural properties protection.

Plans to save at least some of these assets from radiation-related damage are also hampered by the fact that, while Kyoto's temples and shrines are in charge of many of them, others are managed by the Cultural Affairs Agency or the Imperial Household Agency - not the city or prefecture. Coordination between local officials and these agencies on what to do if a nuclear disaster threatens to ruin cultural properties is an issue yet to be addressed, and it has gotten virtually no local political attention.

Given the importance of such cultural assets not only to the history of Kyoto and Japan, but also to the local economy, this is somewhat surprising. In 2011, the city drew more than 10 million visitors who spent at least one night in town. Of these, around 515,000 were foreign tourists.

A survey conducted by the city indicated its temples, shrines, natural surroundings and traditional culture ranked highest among both domestic and overseas visitors in terms of satisfaction.

In December 2011, concerned by the quake and tsunami that wrecked Tohoku and sparked the world's worst nuclear crisis in a generation, Kyoto called for strengthened measures to guard its cultural heritage in the event of natural disasters, noting that "it's not too much to say that Kyoto, without the existence of those properties, cannot be imagined." The report did not include any advice on what to do in the midst of an atomic calamity.

Last November, however, the World Heritage Convention, meeting in Kyoto, had some advice for local governments hosting World Heritage sites that, while too late for Kyoto given the presence of the Fukui plants, served as a warning to others.

"Nuclear power plants should not be built near World Heritage properties," said World Heritage Center Director Kishore Rao.

**Eric Johnston**, *Japan Times* Staff Writer, May 8, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/05/08/national/kyotos-cultural-treasures-at-mercy-of-fukui-reactors/#.UZGJk0pOj1U>

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## **NRA asks Kepco to recheck Oi safety**

The Nuclear Regulation Authority has asked Kansai Electric Power Co. to re-examine the seismic resistance of its Oi plant in Fukui Prefecture on the assumption that three active faults around it might move in tandem during a quake.

The NRA made the request Friday as part of its process of checking whether reactors 3 and 4 - the only ones in Japan currently running - are safe enough to stay online after July, when new safety requirements will take effect.

At a meeting with the NRA, Kansai Electric denied that it needs to consider the potential repercussions of the three active faults being linked.

The faults are all situated within roughly 30 km of the plant, which sits on the Sea of Japan coast. Two are in Wakasa Bay to the northwest and the third is on land to the southeast.

Kansai Electric said it has found that the distance between the two seaside faults and the one on

land is greater than previously estimated.

But NRA Commissioner Kunihiko Shimazaki said that an incident involving interconnected movements of the three faults is “not a bare possibility.”

“I want you to hold discussions by assuming the move will occur,” Shimazaki said.

If the NRA acknowledges the two reactors have no serious safety flaws, they will be allowed to operate through September, when they will be taken offline for routine maintenance and inspections.

Other power companies will have to wait for the new safety requirements to take effect in July before applying to restart their reactors.

The new rules were compiled based on lessons learned in the disaster at Tokyo Electric Power Co.’s Fukushima No. 1 power plant in March 2011.

**Kyodo News**, May 12, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/05/12/national/nra-asks-kepco-to-recheck-oi-safety/#.UZH4D0pOj1U>

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## PROTESTS

### Nuclear foes stage march on Diet

An anti-nuclear power rally Sunday near the Diet building drew 60,000 people, according to the three groups that organized the event, including one led by Nobel literature laureate Kenzaburo Oe.

The Metropolitan Police Department, which provided security for the event, estimated the number of participants at 20,000 to 30,000.

The protesters marched to the Diet after staging rallies in a park and a site near the Diet building earlier in the day.

“Resuming (operating) nuclear power plants is a betrayal to Fukushima,” Oe said at the rally in Shiba Park in Minato Ward.

He also said public opinion is strongly in favor of scrapping all of Japan’s nuclear power plants.

The protest was organized by the Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes, which has been holding weekly rallies outside the prime minister’s office since the start of the Fukushima nuclear crisis in 2011, and a group of labor unions nationwide.

Also taking part was the group led by Oe and other celebrities that has organized an ongoing anti-nuclear campaign dubbed “10 Million People’s Action to say Goodbye to Nuclear Power Plants.”

**Kyodo News**, June 4, 2013

## **Large anti-nuclear rally held near Diet building**

TOKYO (Kyodo) — An anti-nuclear power rally Sunday near the Diet building in Tokyo drew 60,000 people, according to the three groups that organized the event, including one led by Nobel literature laureate Kenzaburo Oe.

The Metropolitan Police Department, which provided security for the event, said the number of participants was between 20,000 and 30,000.

The protesters marched to the Diet building after holding anti-nuclear rallies at a park in central Tokyo and a site near the Diet building earlier in the day.

“Resuming (operating) nuclear power plants is a betrayal to Fukushima,” Oe said at the rally in Shiba park in Tokyo’s Minato Ward, adding public opinion is strongly in favor of scrapping all of Japan’s nuclear power plants.

The protest was organized by the Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes, which has been holding weekly anti-nuclear rallies outside the prime minister’s office since the March 2011 Fukushima nuclear crisis, and a group of labor unions nationwide.

Also taking part was a group led by Oe and other celebrities which has organized an ongoing antinuclear campaign — “10 Million People’s Action to say Goodbye to Nuclear Power Plants” — since the 2011 crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant in Fukushima Prefecture.

**Kyodo News**, June 3, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130603p2g00m0dm037000c.html>

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## **Mayors of municipalities near idled Hamaoka nuke plant oppose reactivation**

SHIZUOKA — The mayors of eight Shizuoka Prefecture municipalities around the idled Hamaoka Nuclear Power Plant have voiced opposition to the reactivation of the power station at the current stage, a *Mainichi Shimbun* survey shows.

Some of the mayors demanded that Chubu Electric Power Co. establish the methods of disposing of spent nuclear fuel as a precondition for the resumption of operations at the plant in Omaezaki. The survey results show that it is becoming increasingly difficult to restart the nuclear power station.

The *Mainichi Shimbun* conducted the survey as two years have passed since the power plant was stopped on May 14, 2011, at the urging of the national government following the outbreak of the

Fukushima nuclear crisis. The Mainichi sent a questionnaire on the issue to Shizuoka Gov. Heita Kawakatsu and the mayors of 11 municipalities, all or part of which fall under the so-called urgent protective action planning zone within a radius of 30 kilometers from the nuclear plant.

The mayors of Makinohara, Kikugawa, Kakegawa, Fukuroi, Iwata, Fujieda, Yoshida and Mori said they cannot agree to reactivation of the power plant under the current conditions. Four of them, including Makinohara Mayor Shigeki Nishihara, replied that they would oppose resumption of operations at the Hamaoka plant even if the national government confirmed its safety.

Nishihara went on to demand that the plant be permanently shut down. "The power station is situated in an area where the epicenter of the Tokai quake is expected to be located. There is a large population and industrial facilities are concentrated around the plant," Nishihara said.

The mayors of Kikugawa, Fukuroi, Iwata and Fujieda as well as Shizuoka Gov. Kawakatsu demanded that a method for the disposal of spent nuclear fuel be firmly established as a precondition for the resumption of operations at the plant.

Shigeo Ishihara, mayor of Omaezaki that hosts the plant, stopped short of clarifying his stance toward reactivation of the plant, while pointing to the need for nuclear plants.

"It's premature to talk about whether the plant should be reactivated as the national government hasn't worked out safety standards yet," he answered. "Nuclear power is necessary because fuel costs have risen and little progress has been made on the practical use of renewable energy."

Shizuoka Gov. Kawakatsu said he will hold a prefectural referendum on the pros and cons of resuming operations at the power station if he is re-elected in the June gubernatorial race.

*Mainichi Shimbun*, May 14, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130514p2a00m0na012000c.html>

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## **Nuke foes start hunger strike at METI**

Opponents of nuclear power started a hunger strike Thursday to press the government to drop a lawsuit demanding they remove their tents from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry.

They sat down in chairs in front of the tents, wearing headbands and happi coats.

"We are not removing the tents," they announced in a statement. "We are against the restart of nuclear power reactors."

"People who are fighting for the end of nuclear power generation meet here and get information here," said Setsuko Kuroda, 62, of Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture, who frequently visits the tents.

"I once got reunited here with a person who was evacuated (due to the Fukushima No. 1 disaster) and celebrated the reunion in tears. Forced removal is just unacceptable," she said.

The campaigners plan to continue the strike at their own pace until noon next Wednesday, the day before the government's lawsuit against them opens at the Tokyo District Court.

They erected their first tent there in September 2011. METI claims that although it has repeatedly asked the activists to take the tents down and leave the area, the site continues to be unlawfully occupied.

**Kyodo News**, May 17, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/05/17/national/nuke-foes-start-hunger-strike-at-meti/#.UZrNY9iz640>

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