

Japan: government nuclear adviser resigns in protest at “the state’s lax response” on safety issues

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Tokyo professor calls response impromptu, says short-term thinking resulted in delays.

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Kan nuclear adviser fed up, quits

Prime Minister Naoto Kan defended his government’s handling of the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 plant on Saturday, a day after one of his advisers on the emergency vowed to resign in protest at what he called the state’s lax response.

Kan told the Lower House Budget Committee the departure of Toshiso Kosako, a professor on antiradiation safety measures at the University of Tokyo’s graduate school who assumed the advisory post March 16, is extremely unfortunate.

“We are dealing with the crisis based on the advice that comes as a result of discussions by the Nuclear Safety Commission of Japan. Our handling of the crisis has never been impromptu,” Kan said.

Kosako told the government Friday he will resign as Kan’s adviser.

“The government has belittled laws and taken measures only for the present moment, resulting in delays in bringing the situation under control,” Kosako said.

It is extremely rare for an intellectual adviser appointed by the prime minister to resign in protest at measures the government has taken.

Kosako told reporters at the Diet on Friday it is problematic for the government to have delayed the release of forecasts on the spread of radiation from the Fukushima plant, done by the Nuclear Safety Technology Center’s computer system, called the System for Prediction of Environmental Emergency Dose Information (SPEEDI).

He also blasted the government for hiking the upper limit for emergency workers seeking to bring the crippled plant under control to 250 millisieverts from 100 millisieverts after the crisis broke out.

“The prime minister’s office and administrative organizations have made impromptu policy

decisions, like playing a whack-a-mole game, ignoring proper procedures,” the radiation expert said.

He also urged the government to stiffen guidelines on upper limits on radiation levels the education ministry recently announced as allowable levels for elementary school grounds in Fukushima Prefecture, where the radiation-leaking plant is located.

The guidelines announced by the Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry “are inconsistent with internationally commonsensical figures and they were determined by the administration to serve its interests,” he said.

As the only country to experience an atomic bombing, Japan has long had a powerful antinuclear movement, and such protests have become louder.

Yoshiko Nakamura, 50, a part-time worker, was among 450 who gathered Saturday in Tokyo’s Yoyogi Park. The demonstrators beat drums, shouted “No more nukes” and held banners that read “Electricity in Tokyo, sacrifice in Fukushima.”

“We knew all along nuclear power was dangerous. I just didn’t know how to express myself,” said Nakamura, taking part in her second demonstration in two weeks. “This is a great opportunity to send a message and voice my fears.”

Such demonstrations have become more frequent, including during the Golden Week holidays, which continue through the weekend and this week. “What I had feared might happen has become reality,” said Kenji Kitamura, a 48-year-old office worker. “It is outrageous children are being exposed to such high levels of radiation.”

Japan Times, Sunday, May 1, 2011

* *From the Japan Times*, Kyodo, AP, Sunday, May 1, 2011
<http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20110501a2.html>

Nuclear-Safety Adviser’s Exit A Misunderstanding: Edano

TOKYO (Dow Jones)—Japan’s chief government spokesman said Saturday that the resignation by a senior science adviser over radiation safety limits for schools around the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant was over a misunderstanding, while Prime Minister Naoto Kan defended the government’s handling of the situation.

Separately, plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (9501) said two workers who received radiation burns from highly radioactive water in an incident March 24 have received close to the legal annual limit of radiation.

The resignation Friday of University of Tokyo Professor Toshiso Kosako was another embarrassment to the Kan government over its handling of the long-running nuclear-plant crisis. Government officials had described Kosako at the time of his appointment in mid-March as an expert in the field of radiation safety.

Kosako, at an emotional news conference Friday, said he was resigning as one of six special advisers

to the prime minister because the government was ignoring the laws over how to handle nuclear disasters and taking ad hoc measures that are prolonging the crisis.

In particular, Kosako called into question the government's radiation safety standards for elementary schools, which he claimed aren't in line with international standards.

But chief government spokesman Yukio Edano said Kosako had misunderstood the government's standard that set the maximum radiation limit for elementary schools in Fukushima Prefecture to 20 millisieverts per year.

"We believe we have firmly complied with the law. There seems to be a misunderstanding," Edano said, adding that the safety standard doesn't mean children in the area will face an annual radiation level of 20 millisieverts. Children are considered at a much higher risk of developing thyroid conditions from the iodine-131 that is prevalent among the contaminants that have escaped from the plant.

Kan, speaking in parliament Saturday morning, defended the government's handling of the case.

"The resignation was due to various differences in opinion among the experts. It's extremely regrettable...but I do not think our response was made in an ad hoc manner," he said.

Kan had been sharply criticized by a senior member of his own Democratic Party, who said the prime minister had declined to even meet with Kosako to discuss his concerns, leading to the formal resignation. The politician, Akihisa Nagashima, said the departure was a "heavy blow."

What constitutes an acceptable radiation level has been an issue from the early days of the crisis. Soon after the crisis worsened and radiation levels at and near the plant rose, the government said workers could receive up to 250 millisieverts of radiation, an increase from the previous standard of 100 millisieverts, which had been deemed the acceptable limit for a nuclear-plant worker within one year.

Tepco said Saturday that two workers, both burned by highly radioactive water, had received close to the 250-millisievert level but hadn't exceeded it. One worker was put at 240.80 millisieverts and the second at 226.62 millisieverts. The two had been laying a power cable at the time when a higher-than-expected level of water had collected and leaked over their rubber boots, burning their feet. They were later hospitalized.

Tepco said 19 other workers have exceeded the level of 100 millisieverts in working at the plant since the March 11 crisis began due to the massive earthquake and tsunami that hit the region.

Tepco had disclosed Wednesday that a woman worker at the plant had received radiation of 17.55 millisieverts in January through March, well over the 5.0-millisievert level for a three-month period allowed for female employees due to the risks that radiation poses to pregnant women.

Nikkei, Saturday, April 30, 2011

* *From Nikkei*, Saturday, April 30, 2011

<http://e.nikkei.com/e/fr/tnks/Nni20110430D30JF570.htm>
