

# Japan: pro-Nuke politicians on the offensive

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## DPJ nuclear power skeptics finding themselves isolated

Members of the ruling Democratic Party of Japan opposing nuclear power are finding themselves increasingly isolated and frustrated as the party appears set to return to pushing for nuclear power under the new administration.

“There are now no venues where we can have our voices heard,” said one of four DPJ members who attended a study meeting earlier this month on the nuclear accident. “I wonder if the party has the will to grapple with the nuclear accident as a political party.”

A project team to address the impact of the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, set up under the previous administration, was abolished after Yoshihiko Noda replaced Naoto Kan as prime minister.

Satoshi Arai, former state minister in charge of national policy, and Upper House member Kuniko Tanioka are among DPJ members opposing nuclear power. Arai headed the project team, which the party formed in April.

The team, comprising about 30 members, held 34 general meetings on the issue.

Many members called for tougher conditions on allowing the restart of nuclear reactors that were undergoing regular safety checks.

In August, the project team proposed that contaminated land in the vicinity of the crippled nuclear power plant be nationalized. It also called for the establishment of a Diet panel to investigate the cause of the nuclear accident.

Arai boasted of his team’s achievements.

“We pushed for measures to deal with the nuclear accident, giving the Kan administration a supportive push,” he said. “Ours is the most successful project team.”

A different project team that deals with power supply issues was formed under the Kan administration, led by Masayuki Naoshima, a former industry minister known for his pro-nuclear power stance.

The project teams related to energy issues—one led by a nuclear skeptic and another by a nuclear power advocate—appeared to be intended to strike a balance within the party.

But these project teams were abolished after the Noda administration took power.

Instead, a new project team was set up to discuss the restart of nuclear reactors and comprehensive energy issues, with a tilt toward the promotion of nuclear power.

The team’s head is Akihiro Ohata, a former industry minister known as a strong proponent of

nuclear power. Ohata was involved in the design of nuclear power plants when he worked for Hitachi Ltd., one of the leading manufacturers of nuclear facilities. He led a shift in the DPJ's stance toward nuclear power to one of promoting it in 2006 when the party was in opposition.

The party's apparent return to nuclear power promotion reflects the intent of Seiji Maehara, chairman of the DPJ Policy Research Committee.

In the Lower House Budget Committee on Sept. 26, Maehara argued for moving the restart of nuclear reactors cleared for regular maintenance to the year-end, instead of from next spring to summer, which Noda referred to as the timing of the resumption in an interview with a U.S. newspaper on Sept. 20.

DPJ nuclear opponents say that they were ostracized from the policy decision-making process because Maehara was intent on shifting to the promotion of nuclear power.

Arai and other former project team members asked Noda and other party top officials to revive the project team looking into the impact of and issues surrounding the nuclear accident.

They are also considering calling for the departure from nuclear power generation in meetings of other project teams and the DPJ members.

But it remains unclear if they can win wide support to their cause or even regain a voice.

**Asahi Shimbun** , October 13, 2011

<http://www.asahi.com/english/TKY201110120299.html>

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## **Japan Underlines Nuclear Plant Export**

Paris, Oct. 18 (Jiji Press)—Japanese trade minister Yukio Edano emphasized Tuesday that Tokyo will continue to promote nuclear plant export even after the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in northeastern Japan.

At an International Energy Agency ministerial meeting here, Edano expressed gratitude for other countries' support in the wake of the crisis at the Tokyo Electric Power Co. <9501> plant knocked out by the March quake and tsunami.

Edano told the participants that Japan intends to share lessons from the crisis with other countries.

He told a later news conference that Japan wants to provide other countries with its world-class nuclear safety technologies and knowledge.

At the same time, Edano said that Japan aims to accelerate efforts to promote the use of renewable energy and development of relevant technologies. He made no mention of a departure from nuclear power generation.

**Jiji Press**, October 18, 2011

<http://jen.jiji.com/jc/eng?g=eco&k=2011101800993>

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## **Hokkaido Electric Postpones Plu-Thermal Introduction**

Sapporo, Oct. 17 (Jiji Press)—Hokkaido Electric Power Co. President Yoshitaka Sato said Monday that the company will postpone for the time being the introduction of a controversial plutonium-recycling program at its Tomari nuclear plant in Hokkaido, northernmost Japan.

He made the announcement at a news conference after an independent panel of the utility released a report Friday that confirmed the company's organized involvement in attempts to manipulate public opinion at past symposiums and other events on the project to start plu-thermal nuclear power generation at the No. 3 reactor of the Tomari plant.

Hokkaido Electric initially planned to begin the plu-thermal generation in spring 2012.

Sato said that the company currently has no plans to cancel the project. The plu-thermal power generation uses mixed oxide, or MOX, fuel, a blend of uranium and plutonium extracted from spent nuclear fuel.

Sato showed Hokkaido Electric's intention to accept the panel's report and apologized for the scandal over the staged symposiums, which he said had "greatly hurt public trust" in the firm.

**Jiji Press**, October 17, 2011

<http://jen.jiji.com/jc/eng?g=eco&k=2011101700810>

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## **Saga gov. said in Aug. he may have to quit over nuclear scandal: lawyer**

SAGA (Kyodo) — Saga Gov. Yasushi Furukawa said in early August that he would have to resign if his remarks that led to a scandal involving the misrepresentation of local opinion regarding nuclear power became known to the public, a lawyer who headed an independent panel set up to investigate the matter said Monday.

Appearing as a witness during a session of the Saga prefectural assembly's ad hoc committee on nuclear safety, lawyer Nobuo Gohara said the governor told him by phone on Aug. 4 that his resignation would be inevitable if his remarks were brought to light.

Furukawa admitted to reporters later Monday that he had made remarks to the effect, while adding that he did not mean to step down immediately. The governor of the southwestern prefecture had repeatedly denied in public that he was responsible for the scandal.

In September, the panel issued a report saying remarks by Furukawa prompted Kyushu Electric Power Co. to solicit e-mails in support of restarting reactors at its Genkai power plant in Saga Prefecture for a state-sponsored TV program in June.

The attempt to make it appear that local people were supportive of restarting the reactors occurred at a time when public concern over the safety of nuclear power was on the rise amid the Fukushima nuclear crisis triggered by the March 11 earthquake and tsunami.

The prefectural assembly had summoned Furukawa to clarify that matter, but the governor declined to attend.

**Kyodo Press**, October 18, 2011

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/10/18/20111018p2g00m0dm018000c.html>

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## **PM hints at approval for some nuclear reactors under construction**

Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda has suggested that he will give the green light to operations of some nuclear reactors under construction.

"The construction of some nuclear power plants has progressed to a great extent. I'll make a final decision on each of them while considering the opinions of the local communities," Noda said in an interview with the Mainichi Shimbun and other media organizations at his office on Oct. 17.

He apparently made the remarks while keeping in mind the No. 3 reactor at the Shimane Nuclear Power Plant, 90 percent of whose construction work has been finished.

Prime Minister Noda also emphasized that Japan will benefit from participating in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement. "The Asia-Pacific region will definitely be the driving force behind economic growth from now on. Pursuing a close economic alliance will bring benefits to Japan."

He said he will decide on the timing of joining in TPP negotiations at an early date.

However, he pointed to the need to clearly explain Japan's plan to participate in the TPP accord to agricultural bodies, medical associations and other skeptical industries. "There are some industrial sectors that are worried about it."

Noda stopped short of clarifying the timing of making a decision on the sticky issue of relocating the U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma in Okinawa Prefecture while maintaining that he respects the bilateral agreement to relocate it to the Henoko district of Nago, Okinawa Prefecture. "I can't say when, but will draw a conclusion as early as possible."

**Mainichi Shimbun**, October 18, 2011

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/10/18/20111018p2a00m0na015000c.html>

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## **Gov't white paper on energy not to call for promotion of nuclear energy**

TOKYO (Kyodo) — A government white paper on energy, which is expected to be approved by the Cabinet soon, will not call for the promotion of nuclear energy in line with Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda's policy of reducing the nation's reliance on nuclear power following the Fukushima nuclear disaster, government sources said Thursday.

The paper, however, stipulates the government's intention to resume operations of idled nuclear plants after regular checkups to secure power generation capacity for the time being, the sources said.

The latest energy white paper lacks descriptions of the advantages and significance of nuclear energy that were seen in the past annual documents. The government delayed the release of the fiscal 2010 white paper in the aftermath of the March 11 disaster.

Sentences on the government's policy of promoting nuclear power "as a key power source" and claims that "safety measures against quakes and tsunamis have been fully implemented" at nuclear plants, were not included in the latest white paper, according to the sources.

The document says the Fukushima disaster triggered by the March earthquake and tsunami "underlined challenges to secure safety" at nuclear power plants, but emphasizes the policy of restarting idled plants on condition that their safety will be more closely scrutinized and local consent for the restart will be obtained.

**Kyodo Press**, October 14, 2011

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/10/14/20111014p2g00m0dm018000c.html>

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### **Japan's reactor capacity utilization rate hits record low 20.6% in Sept.**

TOKYO (Kyodo) — The capacity utilization rate of Japan's 54 commercial nuclear reactors in September fell to a record low of 20.6 percent from 26.4 percent in August amid the Fukushima nuclear crisis, the Japan Atomic Industrial Forum said Friday.

The September rate was the lowest since the forum and the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan began compiling such data in April 1977.

Since the March 11 earthquake and tsunami triggered the Fukushima Daiichi plant disaster, none of the nuclear reactors idled for regular checkups have been allowed to resume operating. Two more reactors were halted for checkups in September.

Nuclear reactors must pass stress tests designed to determine if they can withstand major earthquakes or tsunamis before being allowed to resume operation. But such tests have not been completed for any offline reactors.

The capacity utilization rate has continued to decline from the March level of 58.3 percent and is expected to fall further. On Tuesday, a reactor at Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Genkai nuclear plant in Saga Prefecture came to a halt automatically due to malfunctions.

The average rate for the April-September first half of fiscal 2011 stood at 34.9 percent, about half of the 67.3 percent rate for fiscal 2010.

The latest capacity utilization data still included four damaged reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi plant, which plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. has decided to decommission.

**Kyodo Press**, October 8, 2011

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/10/08/20111008p2g00m0dm024000c.html>

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