

Popular protests in Japan while government decides to restart nuclear plants

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Over 1,300 Fukushima residents file complaint with prosecutors over nuclear crisis

A group of 1,324 Fukushima residents presented a complaint to public prosecutors on June 11 over radiation damage from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, accusing 33 people including Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata of professional negligence resulting in injury and other charges.

It is the first major complaint submitted to public prosecutors over damage from TEPCO's crisis-hit nuclear plant, which was crippled by the March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

Citizens groups have filed similar complaints, but since no cases have yet been formed, prefectural residents decided to seek punishment themselves. They have also filed a complaint alleging professional negligence resulting in death and injury in connection with suicides and hospital patient deaths during evacuation. Public prosecutors will carefully investigate the complaints and then decide on a course of action.

Altogether, 15 TEPCO executives including Katsumata and Masataka Shimizu, who was president of TEPCO when the nuclear disaster broke out, are named in the complaint. Another 15 people, including Haruki Madarame, head of the Nuclear Safety Commission of Japan, and Nobuaki Terasaka, head of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, are from government organizations. The remaining three, who include Fukushima Medical University vice president Shunichi Yamashita, a radiation health risk advisor after the outbreak of the nuclear disaster, are specialists.

The residents accuse the 33 of negligence in their response to the nuclear crisis. They say that after the outbreak of the crisis, the government did not release data from its System for Prediction of Environmental Emergency Dose Information (SPEEDI), which predicts the spread of radiation. They also say that specialists underscored "safety" after the accident. These factors delayed residents' evacuation and caused them to be exposed to radiation, their complaint says. In addition, the residents accuse TEPCO and the company's officials of violating the Environmental Pollution Offense

Law by releasing radioactive materials from the plant.

Madarama was quoted as saying he did not have the details of the complaints, and wanted to refrain from commenting on them.

Speaking in front of the Fukushima District Public Prosecutors Office, Hiroyuki Kawai, a lawyer representing the complainants, described the move as a first step in creating public consensus to question the criminal responsibility of officials.

In a subsequent news conference and gathering, participants vented their anger and frustration.

“Disaster victims should express their anger more,” said 72-year-old Ryuko Tachibana, who was in the Fukushima town of Namie when the nuclear disaster broke out and moved nine times in the wake of the meltdowns. “The wounds that people suffered as a result of the accident are all too deep,” she added, addressing a gathering.

Ruiko Muto, the 58-year-old head of the group that submitted the complaint, told a news conference, “We want to restore our power by having prefectural residents come together as one, saying, ‘We’re not staying silent.’”

A 38-year-old housewife who evacuated last summer from the Fukushima Prefecture city of Koriyama was among those who decided not to take part in the gathering to prevent their children from being exposed to radiation.

“It’s frustrating to ponder the question, ‘Why us?’” she said. “Give us back our lives when we could breathe deep and easy (without worrying about radiation).”

Mainichi Shimbun, June 12, 2012

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120612p2a00m0na011000c.html>

1,300 file criminal complaint against TEPCO execs, nuclear safety officials

FUKUSHIMA, Japan (Kyodo) — Around 1,300 people mainly from Fukushima Prefecture on Monday filed a criminal complaint against Tokyo Electric Power Co. Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata and 32 others, arguing they were responsible for causing the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant and the exposure of the plaintiffs to radiation.

In the written complaint filed with the Fukushima District Public Prosecutors Office, the accusers said the 33, also including former TEPCO president Masataka Shimizu and Nuclear Safety Commission chief Haruki Madarama, neglected to take disaster countermeasures, despite the frequency of earthquakes in Japan and indications by experts of the possibility of tsunami.

They also argued the failure to promptly announce data on the spread of radiation from the System for Prediction of Environmental Emergency Dose Information, or SPEEDI, “hindered evacuation of the residents (around the Fukushima complex) and expanded their radiation exposure.”

The criminal complaint also referred to the damage suffered by those who died while evacuating or working at the Fukushima nuclear power plant, accusing the 33 of professional negligence resulting

in death and injury.

Kyodo Press, June 11, 2012

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120611p2g00m0dm081000c.html>

Antinuclear civic group submits 7.48 mil. signatures to lower house speaker

TOKYO (Kyodo) — An antinuclear civic group led by Nobel literature laureate Kenzaburo Oe and others submitted on Tuesday part of over 7.48 million signatures to the lower house speaker, calling for the abolition of nuclear reactors following the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi plant triggered by the massive earthquake and tsunami last year.

In about a year, the group also led by journalist Satoshi Kamata and economic commentator Katsuto Uchihashi, collected 7,481,352 signatures as of Sunday as part of “10 Million People’s Action to say Goodbye to Nuclear Power Plants,” which opposes nuclear power generation.

The House of Representatives Speaker Takahiro Yokomichi understood the significance of the huge number of signatures collected, Kamata said in a press conference the same day, adding, “We want to put an end to the politics that put economy and money ahead of our lives and health.”

Uchihashi said, “Those people who participated in our signatures campaign share anger and fear felt by victims of radiation and evacuees (of the nuclear crisis)...we never gave consent to the state policy supporting nuclear power generation.”

“Where on earth is the people’s will and democracy, if they do not listen to the voice of 7.5 million...let us once again turn our eyes to those people who remain in Fukushima as well as those who were forced to leave there,” said writer Keiko Ochiai, another activist leading the group.

The civic group also held a meeting for Diet members later in the day, attracting endorsement from over 80 nonpartisan members. More than 30 members of the Diet including former Prime Minister Naoto Kan attended the gathering.

“I changed my idea about nuclear power plants” following the accident last year, Kan said, adding, “The safest way is to do without nuclear plants...we don’t want to leave nuclear reactors to our children and grandchildren.”

The executive committee of the group consisting of the Japan Congress Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs (Gensuikin) among others plans to hand the rest of the signatures to Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda.

Last Wednesday, some 2,300 protesters gathered at Tokyo’s Hibiya Park and the group plans to hold another rally with 100,000 participants at Yoyogi Park also in Tokyo on July 16.

Kyodo Press, June 13, 2012

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120613p2g00m0dm015000c.html>

Tokyo metro assembly votes down proposed nuclear reactor restart referendum bills

A citizens group demand that the Tokyo Metropolitan Government hold referendums on the restart of idled nuclear reactors went down to a narrow defeat in the metropolitan assembly committee on June 18.

Parties backing Tokyo Gov. Shintaro Ishihara, including the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and New Komeito, voted down the original bill, as well as two revised bills on the referendums put by opposition parties at the metropolitan assembly's general affairs committee. If passed, the bills would have required the assembly and the metropolitan government to make efforts to implement policy reflecting the results of local referendums on the restart of reactors run by Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), which operates the disaster-stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

A full assembly vote on the original referendum bill is scheduled for June 20, though with the ruling parties holding a solid majority it is likely to be defeated.

A similar bill was rejected by the Osaka Municipal Assembly in February.

The citizens group "Minna de kimeyo 'genpatsu' kokumin tohyo" (Let's everyone decide on nuclear power national referendum) collected 323,076 signatures on a petition to have the proposal put to the Tokyo government in May this year under the Local Autonomy Law; well above the just over 210,000 necessary.

In submitting the bills to the metropolitan assembly, Gov. Ishihara wrote in his opinion that "deciding on the restart of nuclear reactors is the responsibility of the central government."

After the June 18 vote, Akira Miyazaki, secretary-general of the LDP's Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly caucus, explained his party's opposition to the bill, saying, "A steady electricity supply is essential to protect the economic activities of Tokyo's small- and medium-sized businesses and the livelihoods of its citizens. Energy policy is an issue that must be discussed on a national scale, and not something for individual local governments to get involved with."

Meanwhile, Yoshio Nakajima, secretary-general of Komeito's metropolitan assembly caucus, called the vote "the result of careful discussion within our assembly bloc." However, he also stated that "regarding the movement to build a society freed from dependence on nuclear power," his party was "in agreement" with anti-nuclear Tokyoites and wanted to "work toward that end."

Opposition parties, meanwhile, were bitterly disappointed at the bill's failure, particularly as the proposal was backed by over 320,000 signatures.

"It's sad that even the revised bills put together by the assembly factions were defeated," said Taro Yamashita, secretary-general of the opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) caucus.

Nobuo Yoshida, leader of the assembly's Communist Party members, said that he could "feel the anger at this result, which ignored the people's intent." "Even if a referendum isn't held, we must deepen discussion on the restart of nuclear reactors," Yoshida added.

Kyodo Press, June 19, 2012

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120619p2a00m0na013000c.html>

Public trust in scientists, engineers dropped after Fukushima nuke disaster: gov't report

Public confidence in Japanese scientists and engineers declined after the outbreak in March 2011 of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, the government said in its 2012 white paper on science and technology.

The white paper endorsed by the Cabinet on June 19 said, "Public confidence in scientists and engineers dropped" due to the accident at the crippled Fukushima nuclear power station.

Citing as an example the fact that robots made in Japan were almost useless to deal with the nuclear crisis, the annual government report pointed out that Japanese technological developments were not prepared for actual operations to respond to such disasters. On the fact that the government failed to provide sufficient information to the public, the report said, "It is important to prepare" a mechanism similar to those adopted by Britain and the United States to facilitate the provision of information from scientists to the government.

Asked whether it is good for experts to decide on the direction of research, only 19 percent of ordinary people polled in the questionnaire survey for the white paper said they thought so, down sharply from the pre-disaster level of 59 percent. Meanwhile, in a survey on experts, 43 percent of the respondents said they were trusted, while 39 percent said they were not trusted. The white paper, therefore, lashed out at experts for their low sense of responsibility, saying that they did not take the declining public confidence in them seriously. The report, however, stopped short of making in-depth analysis and proposals as to why the gap in perception between the public and experts was created and what experts should correct or improve.

While stressing the need to recognize higher risks accompanied by developments of science and technology, the report said transmission of information in emergency situations should be discussed on a routine basis. It then said, "Japan must become a country capable of minimizing damage and recovering quickly."

Mainichi Shimbun, June 20, 2012

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120620p2g00m0dm088000c.html>

71 percent against hastily restarting Oi nuclear plant: Mainichi poll

The Japanese government is set to decide this week to reactive two of the Oi Nuclear Power Plant's reactors in Fukui Prefecture, but 71 percent of respondents to a survey by the Mainichi Shimbun say the government should not rush to restart the idled reactors, compared with 23 percent who are in

favor of an early restart.

According to the poll taken June 2 and 3, 48 percent of respondents consider 15 percent as a desirable share of nuclear power in relation to Japan's total power generation in 2030, while 25 percent call for a total abolition of atomic power altogether.

The government of Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda has been trying to gain local consent to bring the Oi reactors back online in an attempt to beat the scorching summer heat in the coming months. The Oi nuclear plant along the Sea of Japan coast is operated by Kansai Electric Power Co.

The government has come up with four options for the nation's future energy mix in 2030 in preparation for compilation of its new energy policy this summer — zero percent, 15 percent, 20-25 percent and levels to be determined by the market — as compared with 26 percent in fiscal 2010 prior to the Fukushima nuclear crisis triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

The Mainichi poll found that only 7 percent back the option of 20-25 percent and 15 percent support the market-oriented option.

Mainichi Shimbun, June 04, 2012

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120604p2a00m0na018000c.html>
