

Restart Japan N-plants? End N-industry?

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Kono renews call for end to nuclear power, eyes another run for LDP president

Taro Kono, an outspoken opponent of nuclear power in the business-oriented Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), said Aug. 9 that Japan should shift to renewable energy by 2050 by reducing energy consumption and filling any power shortage with natural gas.

"I think it's time for the LDP to leave power companies, join with the general public and seriously present an alternative to the (current) energy policy," Kono, an LDP member of the powerful House of Representatives, said during a news conference at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan (FCCJ) in Tokyo.

"Our strategy should be to reduce energy consumption first, then cover (any shortfall) with renewable (energy) as much as possible. And if there is still a gap, let's use natural gas," he said of his energy program, aimed at eliminating dependence on nuclear energy.

An advocate of a nuclear-free energy policy even before the onset of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, Kono, 48, challenged his own party to drop its pro-nuclear policy — a change which he said could force the ruling Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) to change its current energy policy. But he said he is not optimistic about such a change happening anytime soon.

He said he is skeptical because his own party has received huge amounts of money from power companies and the DPJ has been supported by labor unions at those same firms. "So both parties are very (much) under the strong influence of the power companies," he added.

He asked if Japan could break up such a vicious cycle before answering himself, saying, "That's the test we have to pass."

During the press conference at the FCCJ, Kono expressed willingness to run for the LDP presidency again next year. In the 2009 LDP presidential election, following the general elections that drove the long-dominant LDP out of power, former Finance Minister Sadakazu Tanigaki beat former Senior Vice Justice Minister Kono and former Parliamentary Vice Foreign Minister Yasutoshi Nishimura for the party leadership.

He said he is sticking with the largest opposition LDP because there is no alternative. "So my only alternative is to stick with the LDP and take it over, or just start up a new party" like his father Yohei.

The elder Kono, also a lower house member, left the LDP in 1976 to join the breakaway conservative party New Liberal Club before rejoining the LDP in 1986. He later served as LDP president and Speaker of the lower house.

Shiro Yoneyama, *Mainichi Shimbun* Staff Writer, August 9, 2011

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<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/08/09/20110809p2a00m0na015000c.html>

Kyushu Electric Power destroyed documents on pluthermal plant proposal, panel claims

FUKUOKA — The deputy chief of Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s nuclear power generation headquarters ordered documents on a pluthermal nuclear power project destroyed in connection with a campaign to realize the restart of reactors at the Genkai Nuclear Power Plant in Saga Prefecture, an investigative panel has found.

Nobuo Gohara, head of the utility's third-party panel investigating the case, told a news conference in Fukuoka on Aug. 9 that Akira Nakamura, the deputy chief of Kyushu Electric's nuclear power generation headquarters, instructed the destruction of the documents stored at the firm's nuclear power headquarters and Saga branch.

The discarded documents included data on briefings on the pluthermal project to be submitted to the central government, and the third-party panel says it will probe the case to see if Kyushu Electric had engineered a cover-up.

According to the third-party panel's findings, Nakamura ordered his subordinates to dispose of documents about a briefing on the pluthermal project at the Genkai power plant in October 2005 in response to a request on July 21 this year as part of an in-house probe.

Nakamura allegedly sought disposal of the documents, saying the documents would inconvenience a certain individual, Gohara said.

Gohara, a former prosecutor and now a lawyer and professor at Meijo University, speculated that "the individual" would be a politician or a prefectural or central government official.

In wake of Kyushu Electric's massive e-mail campaign to facilitate the resumption of operations at the Genkai plant's reactors, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) ordered electric power companies across Japan to provide details of their measures to mobilize participants in state-sponsored briefings on nuclear power plants.

The briefing in October 2005 was one of those under scrutiny, and Kyushu Electric submitted a report on the briefing to METI on July 29. But the third-party panel's discovery of the alleged cover-up questions the credibility of the utility's report.

On Aug. 5, Nakamura also allegedly ordered the disposal of documents on the pluthermal project

kept at Kyushu Electric's Saga branch, which the third-party panel sought.

But a tip from a whistle-blower prompted the third-party panel to retrieve 15 files left at a disposal site.

Nakamura told the Kagoshima Prefectural Assembly on July 4 just before the staged e-mail scandal surfaced that there was no such e-mail campaign scheme.

Mainichi Shimbun , August 10, 2011

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<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/08/10/20110810p2a00m0na019000c.html>

Oppositions Call for Parliament Panel to Investigate N-Crisis

Tokyo, Aug. 9 (Jiji Press)—Three Japanese opposition parties jointly submitted a bill to the House of Representatives Tuesday to set up an experts panel to investigate the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The main opposition Liberal Democratic Party, together with New Komeito and the Sunrise Party of Japan, will urge other parties including the ruling Democratic Party of Japan to cooperate in enacting the bill by the Aug. 31 end of the current session of the Diet, or Japan's parliament.

The parliamentary panel would consist of 10 independent experts and make a report within six months. The Tokyo Electric Power Co. plant, crippled by the March 11 earthquake and tsunami, is at the center of Japan's ongoing nuclear crisis.

The bill also calls for the launch of a special joint committee of both chambers of the Diet that would consider preventive measures based on the panel's report.

The LDP initially planned to give the panel the authority to summon witnesses for testimony under oath but dropped the idea after talks with other parties.

Jiji Press, August 10, 2011

<http://jen.jiji.com/jc/eng?g=eco&k=2011080901013>

Nuke safety group OKs report saying chances of another Fukushima plant explosion are slim

The Nuclear Safety Commission of Japan (NSC) has approved a report compiled by the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) stating that the possibility is slim that another meltdown and hydrogen explosion will occur at the tsunami-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

The report states that there is only a slim possibility of any serious situation such as another

hydrogen explosion and reactor core meltdown even if a worst-case scenario is assumed. It then says that radiation levels are highly unlikely to increase outside a no-entry zone within a radius of 20 kilometers from the plant even if the spent nuclear fuel pool cooling system stops functioning for a long time.

The report shows that the plant now meets one of the important preconditions for lifting the designation of emergency evacuation preparation zones in some areas 20-30 kilometers away from the crippled plant.

However, NSC, which is under the umbrella of the Cabinet Office, has pointed out that the areas must be decontaminated and kept under surveillance as other key requirements for lifting the designation. It then urged the government to proceed with such work while consulting with local governments concerned.

NISA, which is part of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, compiled the report based on a report that the plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) filed with it on Aug. 3, which declares that the injection of water into the crippled reactors is stable.

NISA's report states another hydrogen explosion is highly unlikely, noting that nitrogen is being injected into the power station's No. 1 to 3 reactors in order to prevent such an explosion and that newly generated hydrogen is released into the air with steam.

Even if a hydrogen explosion takes place, it will have little effect on radiation doses in areas 20 kilometers away from the No. 1 reactor.

Moreover, it describes TEPCO's readiness to reactivate the water injection function within 30 minutes to three hours even if it accidentally stops as "an appropriate emergency response."

As water injection into the reactors was suspended for up to about 14 hours shortly after the accident in March, NISA analyzed what would happen if water injection stopped for 15 hours.

On the assumption that most of the fuel has already melted down, the report says the annual radiation dose in an area 20 kilometers from the plant is estimated at 0.65 millisieverts.

NSC, which closely reviewed the report, has concluded that there is little chance that the situation with the plant will worsen to a level that would require further evacuation orders.

Questions remain about NSC's approval of the NISA report, which concludes that there is only a slim possibility of another hydrogen explosion and meltdown, as the crisis at the nuclear power station was triggered by factors beyond the scope of experts' assumptions.

When asked about his interpretation of what the report describes as "a worst-case scenario," NSC Chairman Haruki Madarame said, "There's no limit if you start assuming serious situations. The commission approved the report based on commonsensical standards."

It also remains unclear how NSC decided to endorse the report. NISA instructed TEPCO on Aug. 2 to file an additional report by the following day about measures that the utility will take if the injection system, which is a key to the stabilization of the crippled reactors, develops trouble.

TEPCO kept the deadline, and NISA filed its report on Aug. 4 with NSC, which approved it later in the day.

Sources involved in the case have revealed that the relevant parties consulted with each other over

the report for about a month behind closed doors, but neither NSC nor NISA has disclosed the details of what they discussed.

“What we discussed was highly technical, and we thought the public would hardly understand it if we disclosed the details,” says Vice Chairman Yutaka Kukita, former professor at Nagoya University’s graduate school.

However, the situation in which important matters that could affect citizens’ lives are discussed behind closed door should be rectified at an early date.

By Ei Okada, Tokyo Science and Environment News Department, *Mainichi Shimbun*, August 5, 2011

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<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/08/05/20110805p2a00m0na018000c.html>

Japan’s largest labor organization questions nuclear energy policy

HIROSHIMA (Kyodo) — Japan’s largest labor organization questioned the country’s energy policy Thursday, including the promotion of nuclear power generation in the wake of the crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

“The basis of what Japan’s energy policy should be, including nuclear power, is being questioned,” Hiroyuki Nagumo, secretary general of the Japanese Trade Union Confederation, told an antinuclear gathering in Hiroshima.

“The Japanese people’s trust in nuclear power generation has been lost,” Nagumo told around 6,500 participants at the event organized jointly by the confederation, the Japan Congress Against A- and H-Bombs, and the National Council for Peace and Against Nuclear Weapons.

It was the first time that the confederation, known as Rengo, has mentioned the issue of nuclear energy since it began co-organizing in 2005 a series of annual peace events to commemorate the U.S. atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Hiroshima Mayor Kazumi Matsui and Hiroshima Gov. Hidehiko Yuzaki attended the gathering on Thursday.

But Nagumo did not elaborate further on the issue of nuclear energy, reflecting tensions within Rengo, which is the biggest supporter of the ruling Democratic Party of Japan and has labor unions representing workers at power utilities and nuclear reactor manufacturers under its wing.

“We have to start discussions concerning nuclear energy from the beginning to decide on what we should do in the future,” Nagumo told a press conference earlier Thursday.

The confederation and the antinuclear groups have been united in opposing nuclear weapons and calling for better support measures for atomic-bomb survivors.

But the confederation and the council promoted nuclear power generation before the March 11 earthquake and tsunami crippled the Fukushima complex and led it to release a massive amount of radiation.

Rengo decided in May to freeze its policy of promoting the construction of new nuclear power plants. But the Japanese Electrical, Electronic & Information Union, a member of Rengo, called in July for restarting nuclear power reactors that have been shut down for regular checks.

Koichi Kawano, a Nagasaki atomic-bomb survivor and the head of the congress, said in his address to the event, "With many people questioning the safety of nuclear power plants, how can we go on without talking about the problem of nuclear plants?"

"A nuclear power plant accident and use of a nuclear weapon cause similar damage. Humans and atomic power cannot coexist," he said.

Kyodo, August 5, 2011

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<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/08/05/20110805p2g00m0dm018000c.html>

Reactor utilization rate drops to record low of 33.9% in July

TOKYO (Kyodo) — The operation rate of Japan's 54 commercially run nuclear reactors was as low as 33.9 percent in July, down from 36.8 percent in June, according to a recent report compiled by the Japan Atomic Industrial Forum.

The ratio for July is believed to be the lowest on record if data during days when the number of reactors was much smaller than now are excluded, said the nonprofit industrial organization aimed at promoting the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

The drop was due to the effects of the March 11 disaster, which crippled Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, and the suspended operation of the No. 4 reactor at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Takahama plant and the No. 4 reactor at the utility's Oi plant, both in Fukui Prefecture, for regular inspections starting July 21 and 22, respectively.

The rate of capacity utilization stood at 58.3 percent in March, 50.9 percent in April and 40.9 percent in May. The rate is expected to stay low as reactors, currently suspended for regular inspections, will have to clear stress tests before resuming operations.

The latest data include the Nos. 1 to 4 reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi plant as legal procedures to decommission them have yet to start.

The highest operating rate on record is 94.3 percent marked in August 1996.

Kyodo, August 6, 2011

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<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/08/06/20110806p2g00m0dm017000c.html>

Japan likely to decommission aged nuclear reactors after stress tests

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Industry minister Banri Kaieda said Friday that Japan's aged nuclear reactors could be decommissioned if results of the planned stress tests on them indicate aging problems.

"If test data indicate aging problems, the next step may be decommissioning," the economy, trade and industry minister told a press conference.

The government decided in July to conduct the stress tests as doubts over the safety of reactors have deepened in the wake of the nuclear emergency at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

Japanese electricity utilities planned service lives for nuclear reactors of between 30 and 40 years when they built them. About one-third of Japan's 54 existing commercial nuclear reactors are more than 30 years old, including the six at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

While Kansai Electric Power Co. plans to continue operation of a reactor in Fukui Prefecture that will be 40 years old next July, the prefectural government has vowed not to approve its continued operation unless the central government sets new safety standards.

Kyodo, August 6, 2011

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<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/08/06/20110806p2g00m0dm016000c.html>

LOCAL PLANTS

Commercial operation of Tomari nuclear reactor to be delayed

SAPPORO (Kyodo) — The industry ministry on Thursday barely avoided a clash with a local government over commercial operation of a reactor at the Tomari nuclear power plant in Hokkaido, as the ministry decided to wait for Hokkaido Gov. Harumi Takahashi to render a judgment on the issue.

The move will delay for some several days the completion of an unusually long scheduled inspection process and in returning the No. 3 reactor to commercial operation.

The No. 3 reactor is already generating electricity at full capacity under what is known as an "adjustment operation" in the final phase of the checkup, so there is effectively no difference in terms of electricity output by approving the restart of commercial operation.

But the local government has taken a cautious stance about giving a go-ahead to the commercial

operation, apparently because none of the nuclear reactors in the country has restarted commercial operations since the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi complex erupted in March, heightening public concerns about the safety of nuclear power.

With the adjustment operation period continuing about five months, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, which has the nuclear regulatory agency under its wing, has urged Hokkaido Electric Power Co. to apply for the final test of the regular inspection process so that the reactor can move on to commercial operation.

But Takahashi has criticized that move as “disregard” for local people, leading industry minister Banri Kaieda to tell her Wednesday night by phone that he thinks the governor’s decision about the issue is important and the ministry would “wait,” according to prefectural government sources.

While the reactor is unlikely to start commercial operation Thursday as once thought, the governor is expected to express her approval in several days after discussing the matter with other local governments.

Kaieda told reporters later in the day that he hopes to issue a certificate on the completion of regular checks “as soon as possible” after winning consent from Hokkaido, given that the reactor cleared the final test to check its safety Thursday.

Nuclear reactors suspended for regular checkups need to undergo certain “stress tests” before restarting operations, but the government has said that the case of the Tomari reactor is not a “restart” because the reactor is already activated.

Kyodo, August 11, 2011

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<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/08/11/20110811p2g00m0dm053000c.html>

Fukushima to create nuclear-free society through reconstruction

FUKUSHIMA (Kyodo) — Fukushima Prefecture on Thursday adopted a policy to make the creation of a nuclear-free society the centerpiece of its 10-year project to rebuild in the wake of the disaster at a local nuclear power plant crippled by the March earthquake and tsunami.

The northeastern prefecture’s decision made it the first local authority in Japan among those hosting nuclear power facilities to turn against nuclear energy.

The specifics for the reconstruction project based on the new policy will be worked out later this year.

The policy, called “vision for reconstruction,” calls for an environmental endeavor aimed at creating a society that can achieve sustainable development in safety without relying on nuclear power.

The vision also points out the paradox of Fukushima bearing the brunt of the on-going nuclear crisis because it is home to large nuclear complexes that supply energy to outside the prefecture.

Fukushima made the vision official after releasing a draft last month and getting feedback from local residents and municipalities.

As a result, a provision was added to the draft to press the national government to immediately set official safety standards against radiation.

Kyodo, August 11, 2011

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<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/08/11/20110811p2g00m0dm024000c.html>

Hokkaido to OK resumption of commercial operation of Tomari reactor

SAPPORO (Kyodo) — Hokkaido Gov. Harumi Takahashi on Friday hinted at approving the full commercial operation of the No. 3 reactor at the Tomari nuclear power plant in Hokkaido as early as next week.

Takahashi told a news conference that the Hokkaido government will not spend more time on the question of resuming the commercial operation of the reactor in the village of Tomari in southwestern Hokkaido.

The Hokkaido government's decision has "nothing to do with the ongoing Bon holiday season," she said.

The No. 3 reactor at the three-reactor Tomari plant is actually already generating electricity at full capacity under what is known as an "adjustment operation" in the final phase of regular checkups.

Earlier, Takahashi reacted against the central government which she said had urged the plant operator, Hokkaido Electric Power Co., to apply for the final test of the regular inspection process so that the reactor could move on to full commercial operation.

But on Friday, the governor said she had misunderstood the situation.

Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Banri Kaieda had told her it was up to Hokkaido Electric whether to apply for the final test of the reactor before resuming full commercial operation, Takahashi said.

The Nuclear Safety Commission of Japan supervised the final-phase check of the No. 3 reactor carried out by the Nuclear and Industry Safety Agency, an organization under Kaieda's ministry.

The Hokkaido government is currently checking with the local governments of four municipalities around the Tomari plant over the resumption of commercial operation of the reactor.

The prefectural assembly plans to convene a panel session on nuclear energy early next week.

None of the nuclear reactors in Japan that have been shut down for regular checkups has resumed commercial operations since the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi complex following the March 11 earthquake-tsunami disaster, which heightened public concerns about the safety of

nuclear power.

Nuclear reactors suspended for regular checkups need to undergo “stress tests” before resuming operations, but the central government has said that the case of the Tomari reactor is not a restart because the reactor is already activated.

Kyodo, August 13, 2011

* <http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/news/20110813p2g00m0dm010000c.html>

Hokkaido Residents Seek Injunction against N-Reactor Restart

Sapporo, Aug. 1 (Jiji Press)—Residents of Hokkaido, northern Japan, on Monday filed a lawsuit seeking a court injunction to block the restart of a local nuclear reactor.

In the suit, brought to Sapporo District Court, 38 local residents are calling for industry minister Banri Kaieda not to grant a certificate for the completion of routine maintenance checks at the No. 3 reactor of Hokkaido Electric Power Co.’s <9509> Tomari nuclear plant.

They claim that it is illegal for the national government to grant the go-ahead for the restart of a nuclear reactor based on what they describe as wrong regulatory safety guidelines.

The plaintiffs say the fate of the reactor at Tomari will have an impact on nuclear plants nationwide.

Power utilities across the country struggle to resume commercial operations at nuclear reactors halted for routine maintenance following the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power station, which was severely damaged by the March 11 earthquake and tsunami.

Jiji Press, Aug. 1, 2011

* <http://jen.jiji.com/jc/eng?g=eco&k=2011080100824>

Final test at Hokkaido N-power reactor sought

Hokkaido Electric Power Co. has asked the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency to conduct a final test on the No. 3 reactor at its Tomari nuclear power plant in order to facilitate the reactor’s return to full operation.

If the request is approved and the reactor passes the test, it will be the first reactor in the nation undergoing regular inspections to return to full operation since the March 11 disaster.

At a press conference Tuesday, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano said, “After we consult with the Cabinet Office’s Nuclear Safety Commission, and if the test [at the No. 3 reactor] reveals no problems, its safety inspections will officially end.”

The government intends to allow the 912,000-kilowatt reactor in Tomarimura, Hokkaido, to resume

full operation in the near future, based on the safety commission's views.

Hokkaido Electric's request came after the central government responded to a list of questions submitted by the Hokkaido government. In its response, the central government said, "A final test is not intended to allow the restart [of a nuclear power plant], but rather to facilitate its continued operation."

A final inspection of the No. 3 reactor at the Tomari plant was initially planned for early April, after which the reactor would have returned to full operation.

However, a series of accidents at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant prompted Hokkaido Electric to take emergency safety steps, including implementing measures against tsunami, forcing the Tomari plant's reactor to remain in limited operation for more than five months.

The Yomiuri Shimbun , August 10, 2011

* <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T110809005329.htm>

No. 1 reactor at Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant suspended for checkups

NIIGATA (Kyodo) — The No. 1 nuclear reactor at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in Niigata Prefecture was suspended early Saturday for a 60-day scheduled checkup, Tokyo Electric Power Co. said, bringing to 15 the total number in operation among the nation's 54 commercial reactors.

The utility known as TEPCO is required to undertake a newly-introduced safety assessment procedure before restarting the reactor.

Asked if the prefectural government would approve resumption of the Kashiwazaki-Kariya reactor after the regular checkup and safety assessment, Niigata Gov. Hirohiko Izumida told a press conference Friday, "It is necessary to first examine the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant. It is not the time to discuss the resumption (of the reactor)."

TEPCO President Toshio Nishizawa has indicated the utility must obtain local consent to resume suspended reactors.

Of the seven reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant, Nos. 5 to 7 are currently in operation, but the No. 7 reactor will also be suspended on Aug. 23 for regular maintenance, further stoking concerns about electricity shortages, particularly in the Tokyo metropolitan area.

The utility plans to overcome any potential shortfall by resuming its thermal power plants, it said.

The Nos. 2 to 4 reactors have not been operational since a magnitude 6.8 earthquake struck the Chuetsu region of Niigata Prefecture in July 2007. They are categorized as "undergoing regular checks."

Both the Niigata plant and the crippled Fukushima Daiichi plant are operated by TEPCO.

Kyodo, August 6, 2011

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Residents' group asks court to stop restart of Fukui Pref. nuke reactors

OTSU — Residents in four prefectures have applied for a temporary court injunction against the restart of seven nuclear reactors in Fukui Prefecture, citing the Fukushima nuclear crisis as proof that national safety standards for nuclear plant design are faulty.

The injunction application was filed at the Otsu District Court on Aug. 2 by 168 residents of Shiga, Kyoto, Osaka and Fukui prefectures living between 20 and 110 kilometers from the Fukui reactors, operated by Kansai Electric Power Co. and currently shut down for regular safety inspections. Helping represent the citizens' group is the company of former judge Kenichi Ido, who ordered the No. 2 reactor at Hokuriku Electric Power Co.'s Shika nuclear plant shut down in 2006 when on the bench of the Kanazawa District Court.

According to the court filing, the residents are targeting the injunction at reactors 1 and 3 at the Mihama nuclear plant, reactors 1, 3 and 4 at the Oi plant, and reactors 1 and 4 at the Takahama nuclear station. The residents point out in the request that the reactors have deteriorated with age, and that any accident could contaminate Lake Biwa north of Kyoto with radioactive substances, causing inestimable damage to the health of the surrounding population.

The filing also asserts that "there is no need to consider" the long-term loss of power caused by the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Plant. It furthermore states that if the government fails to create new safety standards based on the investigation into the Fukushima crisis, neither regular inspections nor operations at the Fukui reactors can recommence.

"If, for example, there was even a one percent risk of an accident, nuclear power plants would have to be shut down," Ido told reporters after the filing.

Mainichi Shimbun , August 3, 2011

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<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/08/03/20110803p2a00m0na019000c.html>

Saga governor urged good spin on reactor talks

SAGA – Saga Gov. Yasushi Furukawa admitted Monday that he suggested the idea of soliciting emails during a government-sponsored TV program to express public support for restarting reactors at its Genkai nuclear power plant.

Furukawa said he told Kyushu Electric Power Co. executives in a June 21 meeting that email or Internet solicitation would be necessary to gather positive opinions on restarting the halted reactors. The local, industry ministry-sponsored TV program was aired live on June 26.

Although he has denied that he was trying to instruct them to fake public opinion, it is likely he will come under pressure to resign.

Kyushu Electric recently admitted it attempted to fabricate local public support for restarting two reactors at the Genkai power plant by urging employees of the utility and its affiliates to send comments in favor of the issue to the TV program via email and fax.

The issue has been complicated by nuclear safety fears generated by the radiation-spewing Fukushima No. 1 plant.

Furukawa's remarks were sent to about 100 people, mostly Kyushu Electric employees, and "there is a sufficient possibility that his comments triggered the mail scandal," said Nobuo Gohara, head of Kyushu Electric's third-party panel set up to probe the case.

The prefectural government said that the governor had received about 130 emails by Monday morning to protest his comments.

Kyodo, Aug. 1, 2011

* <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20110801x2.html>
