

Kan told Tokyo residents may have to evacuate due to nuclear crisis

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TOKYO (Kyodo) — Former Prime Minister Naoto Kan said in a recent interview with Kyodo News that he learned shortly after the nuclear crisis erupted at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant that around 30 million people in Tokyo and surrounding prefectures may have to be evacuated in a worst-case scenario.

Kan said he contemplated the chaos that would have ensued if such a measure had been taken. “It was a crucial moment when I wasn’t sure whether Japan could continue to function as a state,” he said.

After the March 11 earthquake and tsunami crippled the plant, Kan instructed several entities to simulate what would happen in a worst-case scenario and received assessments that people living in areas located 200 to 250 kilometers from the power plant, encompassing a large swath of Tokyo, would have to be evacuated.

“I felt that the risk was at its highest during the first 10 days (after the disaster struck),” said Kan, who resigned as prime minister earlier this month.

He also said when the disaster occurred, there were no effective safeguards in place because “We had never foreseen a situation in which a quake, tsunami and a nuclear plant accident would occur at the same time.”

Concerning Tokyo Electric Power Co.’s failure on March 11 to immediately perform “venting” to release radioactive steam from the nuclear reactors at the plant, despite his repeated requests, Kan said,

“Even TEPCO officials (who were with me) at the prime minister’s office were unable to fully explain why they were not doing the venting, so I wasn’t sure whether there was good communication between the TEPCO head office and the Fukushima plant.”

Because of this, Kan said, he went to inspect the Fukushima plant the following day.

Upon hearing on March 15 that TEPCO wanted to evacuate the workers at the Fukushima plant, Kan said, “I thought that was impossible.” He subsequently rejected TEPCO’s request.

P.S.

* Kyodo, September 19, 2011

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/09/19/20110919p2g00m0dm002000c.html>