

Japan's capabilities as democratic nation tested: Kenzaburo Oe

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TOKYO (Kyodo) — Japan's capabilities as a democratic nation are now being tested in the wake of the 2011 nuclear disaster and the controversial deployment of U.S. military aircraft in Okinawa Prefecture, Kenzaburo Oe, the 1994 Nobel laureate for literature, said Saturday.

"I could see hope when the government decided to terminate nuclear power generation in the 2030s in accordance with the public will," Oe told a public gathering in Tokyo. "But it immediately faced backlash from the business circle and the United States, and refrained from adopting it (as a rigid policy) at a Cabinet meeting."

He also told around 1,800 people at the rally organized by the pro-Constitution group, the Article 9 Association, "The accident-prone Osprey aircraft will soon be deployed at the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station in Okinawa, although tens of thousands of local people gathered to show their opposition. And Japan cannot say anything to the United States about this issue."

"Under these circumstances, can we say Japan is an independent democratic country?" Oe asked, stressing the necessity for Japan to stick to the ideas expressed in the war-renouncing Constitution despite the current turmoil.

The Article 9 Association was founded in 2004 by nine intellectuals, including Oe, to counter growing voices for constitutional amendment, particularly Article 9, and has generated more than 7,500 like-minded groups across Japan so far.

Article 9 stipulates that Japan forever renounces war, noting, "Land, sea and air forces as well as other war potential will never be maintained."

Another founder, Yasuhiro Okudaira, told the rally that some social commentators currently argue that the idea of anti-nuclear power is "an empty idealism" similar to unarmed neutrality.

Okudaira, professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo specializing in constitutional studies, indicated, however, people in Japan have made efforts to realize the constitutional ideas and "we need to focus on them once again" at a time when Japan faces various controversies, such as the dispute of the future energy strategy and territorial rows with neighboring countries.

One of the nine founders of the association, Mutsuko Miki, the wife of former Prime Minister Takeo Miki, died in July at the age of 95. Three others, including influential writer Makoto Oda, have also passed away.

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