朝日新聞デジタル Japanese 朝日新聞中文网 Chinese Asahi Asia Antenna - 독자와 함께 Korean

Fukushima communities still crippled as evacuees choose to stay away

October 02, 2012 0

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Only one in 10 evacuees from certain towns close to the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant has returned home, a year after officials declared it was safe to do so.

Just 3,160 evacuees, or about 11 percent of the total from that area, have returned, The Asahi Shimbun has learned, while others have chosen to stay away amid slow progress in restoring infrastructure and decontaminating properties.

The figures relate to those residents whose homes were between 20 and 30 kilometers from the crippled plant. For almost five months after the disaster, officials designated it an "emergency evacuation preparation zone" and urged children, pregnant women and the infirm to leave. They told other residents to stockpile supplies and prepare to stay indoors or to flee in the event of a further heavy radiation release.

Officials imposed the order on April 22, 2011, but then lifted it on Sept. 30, citing low radiation levels.

The zone was home to about 58,000 people. About 27,800, or 48 percent, fled.

Although schools have reopened and hospital wards have begun accepting patients again, only 11 percent of the evacuees have returned.

The zone comes under the jurisdiction of five local governments: Minami-Soma, Tamura, Kawauchi, Naraha and Hirono.

Schoolchildren in particular are conspicuously absent.

At 12 elementary and junior high schools in Minami-Soma, only 55 percent of the children who were supposed to attend school are doing so.

In Kawauchi the figure is 17 percent, and 19 percent in Hirono.

Local businesses also have not resumed full activity.

In a survey by the Haramachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Minami-Soma, many companies said the main reasons were poor progress in decontamination work and the delayed return of evacuees.

Yet the rules relaxation has seen one change. Minami-Soma has recorded an influx of people aged 65 or older.

Residents of that age group comprise 32 percent of the total population, up from 25 percent before the disaster.

Supermarket chain Kikuchi Corp. reopened two of its three outlets in the area after the disaster, although a third one remains closed.

"We are preparing to reopen that outlet by repairing damaged facilities," said a senior company official. "The remaining problem is staff. We do not know how soon we shall be able to get staff again."

A noodle shop in Haramachi in Minami-Soma reopened in June last year, but was forced to close again in February.

A 34-year-old manager said only six of 14 staff, including him, returned. And two of them quit over concerns for their children's radiation exposure.

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN