

NATIONAL

Fukushima needs help beyond protests in Tokyo: sociologist

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Hiroshi Kainuma, a sociologist from Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, underlines the need for sustained efforts to reconstruct the prefecture two years into the country's worst nuclear crisis Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Calls for reducing the nation's reliance on nuclear power to zero are as strong as ever, with protest rallies continuing to be held around the prime minister's office.

"I wonder how many antinuclear protesters have come to Fukushima," said Kainuma, a researcher at Fukushima University's Fukushima Future Center for Regional Revitalization. "They say they are protesting for Fukushima, but few have come to the prefecture to help.

"If people only say with a dosimeter in hand that nuclear power is dangerous, that would mean nothing, but it makes locals uncomfortable," he said.

There will be no improvement in the situation Fukushima Prefecture is facing unless problems such as the decline of local industries, the aging of society and the sluggish birthrate are resolved, he said, adding that sustained efforts to tackle these problems are needed.

For example, Kainuma said, young people in the Aizu region have started to make cotton handkerchiefs. With elderly people who evacuated from the town of Okuma, located close to the crippled plant, now also engaged in handkerchief production, cotton products are becoming a regional specialty, Kainuma said.

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