Gov’t sticks to 3-year deadline on reactor restart decision

NATIONAL DEC. 31, 2012 - 07:04AM JST

TOKYO — Japan’s new government says it hopes to stick to a three-year deadline to decide whether to restart all nuclear reactors after safety checks, despite the country’s newly formed nuclear regulator saying the deadline was impossible to meet.

Economy Minister Toshimitsu Motegi, who is also responsible for energy policy, said Sunday that reactors would be restarted as units received the all-clear from the atomic regulator.

“We will rely on the NRA (Nuclear Regulation Authority) to judge safety from an expert point of view and will not restart ones as long as safety is not confirmed,” Motegi told a news conference.

NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka said in an interview in the Asahi newspaper on Friday that completing safety checks within the three-year timeframe set by new Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will be impossible to meet.

All but two of Japan’s 50 reactors remain switched off after an earthquake and tsunami caused meltdowns and explosions at the Fukushima Daiichi station in northeastern Japan in March 2011.

Atomic energy supplied about 30% of Japan’s needs before Fukushima, but since the disaster support for nuclear power has plummeted.

Abe’s government, which was installed last Wednesday after a landslide election victory, has said it will take 10 years to decide on the best energy mix for Japan.

“We have not decided on the policy of going zero-nuclear by the 2030s,” Motegi said, referring to the previous government’s policy.

An order from former Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda to restart the two reactors now operating in Fukui Prefecture prompted the biggest demonstrations in the country in decades and contributed to his election defeat this month.

The NRA, which still needs to draft new rules on safety, has signalled it will take a tougher stance on nuclear stations situated over possible seismic fault lines and prevent risky plants from restarting.

If a review of a faultline under the operating reactors at the Oi nuclear plant in Fukui Prefecture shows it is active, the NRA will request a halt for the units, operated by Kansai Electric Power Co, Tanaka said in the interview.

A panel of NRA experts last week confirmed its assessment that there are active faults under the Higashidori nuclear plant in Aomori Prefecture, which is owned by Tohoku Electric Power Co, Tanaka said in the interview.

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time it needs to ensure the safety at the atomic power plants is at the highest level possible because prior to 3/11 they weren’t even up to international standards, will we see a showdown between the Nuclear Regulation Authority and the LDP govt?

paulinusa DEC. 31, 2012 - 09:12AM JST 

"NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka said in an interview in the Asahi newspaper on Friday that completing safety checks within the three-year timeframe set by new Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will be impossible to meet.

"Impossible" within three years? I'm not a nuclear expert but it seems like a long period of time to me.

warispeace DEC. 31, 2012 - 10:14AM JST 

Expect the NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka to be replaced or be bullied into accepting the LDP timeline. Abe just appointed Imai Takaya, a pro-nuke bureaucrat from METI who helped negotiate the Oi restart, as a policy advisor. Imai has deep ties to Nippon Steel. This is a signal that the nuclear village people are back with their eager hands ready to reach into the public purse.

Jan Claudius Weirauch DEC. 31, 2012 - 11:29AM JST 

there will be 3 new prime ministers in this time frame...prepare for a populist government which gets nothing done, neither good or bad (such as restarting reactors)

smithinjapan DEC. 31, 2012 - 11:56AM JST 

"Japan's new government says it hopes to stick to a three-year deadline to decide..."

That's all I need to read. They can't even decide on anything and so have to set deadlines for thinking about deciding. Only in Japan.

Rick Kisa DEC. 31, 2012 - 12:39PM JST 

"Gov't sticks to 3-year deadline on reactor restart decision. We have not decided on the policy of going zero-nuclear by the 2030s," Motegi said, referring to the previous government's policy.

What is the new govt's energy policy if it is trashing that of the former regime? I have not even heard the new government mentioning anything related to promotion of alternative sources of energy apart from nuclear? Is the new govt's only value proposition to promote nuke energy, despite safety concerns?

zichi DEC. 31, 2012 - 12:50PM JST 

PM Abe and is govt should allow the NRA to do their job and treat them as the independent body of experts they are supposed to be.

Yubaru DEC. 31, 2012 - 01:08PM JST 

All but two of Japan’s 50 reactors remain switched off after an earthquake and tsunami caused meltdowns and explosions at the Fukushima Daiichi station in northeastern Japan in March 2011.

I thought that they ALL were switched off and that two were turned back on well after the tsunami? Reading this makes it sound like the two that were restarted actually stayed on the entire time. Even the news readers commented at the time prior to their restart that it was the first time since about 1970 or so that Japan had no nuclear reactors online.

globalwatcher DEC. 31, 2012 - 01:36PM JST 

Is there any talk on alternative energy development by the LDP? Or has it been down to tube already?

zichi DEC. 31, 2012 - 01:46PM JST 

You don't "switch off" nuclear reactors like a light, they are in shut down condition but still contain their nuclear fuel, has does the thousands of tons of spent fuel in cooling pools.

Japan is the bad boy of the nuclear club with other countries blaming the culture of Japan for the nuclear disaster and not the fact that it isn't safe to use nuclear energy in a volatile country that sits on the Pacific Ring of Fire and three tectonic plates.

The Japanese people and the world, needs to know that these atomic plants are safe, and if not, should be decommissioned.

Rick Kisa DEC. 31, 2012 - 02:47PM JST 

@globalwatcher

Is there any talk on alternative energy development by the LDP? Or has it been down to tube already?

Exactly, thats the problem. The new govt priority seems to only be shelve all innovative sustainable energy solutions and quickly switch on nuke plants, which I find inappropriate. All new gvt statements seem to suggest that the economic downturn of Japan is because of less nuke energy, which is not entirely right. The economy was already bad before 3/11. Japan recently went through an unusually hot summer months without a problem and with all nuke plants switched off! The new gvt should give Japanese its sustainable happiness.
energy policy, which should determine actionable pathways. This is the type of leadership Japanese are looking for.......

zichi  DEC. 31, 2012 - 02:56PM JST  Good |  Bad

Is there any talk on alternative energy development by the LDP? Or has it been down to tube already? well the LDP have only been in govt since Wednesday, and maybe they won't be has keen on renewable energy but the feed-in-tariff is already in place for 20 years, and some companies have already invested large sums but I expect they'll try to reduce the rate of the tariff. The LDP's partner, the Komeito Party are also strongly opposed to using nuclear energy and changing Article 9 of the constitution. The LDP will have to find the way to deal with the Komeito, which it needs.

Yubaru  DEC. 31, 2012 - 03:39PM JST  Good |  Bad

I didn't feel like having to write a paragraph to describe what one word could do. They stopped producing electricity, meaning that the nuclear reactions were...see, switched off gets the point across so everyone can understand it.

globalwatcher  DEC. 31, 2012 - 04:01PM JST  Good |  Bad

What had happend to all these right wingers who were all excited about the LDP's win? I do not see any comment from them. They are all too quiet on this topic. Interesting.....only in Japan.

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