Economics Minister Seiji Maehara said on Friday nuclear reactors can be restarted if a new regulator deems them safe, throwing into confusion how the dozens of units idle since the Fukushima disaster could be used in future energy plans.

Maehara, whose ministry had led debate in the cabinet on energy policy, said a new law empowered the regulator to endorse bringing reactors back on line. He said the idle reactors could be a key source of power generation for now, a notion certain to anger Japan’s growing ranks of opponents of nuclear power.

“If safety is approved, such reactors would be considered as an important power source,” Maehara, who also oversees national strategy, told a news conference. “We should rely on nuclear as an energy option for the time being.”

But procedures for going ahead with restarts remain unclear.

The new nuclear watchdog, the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA), said this week it does not hold ultimate responsibility to authorize reactor restarts and is concerned solely with safety.

All 50 working commercial reactors in Japan were taken off line for safety checks following the earthquake and tsunami that triggered meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi plant in the worst nuclear accident in a quarter of a century.

Two units were brought back on line after receiving an endorsement from now defunct regulatory bodies, but the final decision on restarting them was taken by Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda and three other ministers.

The restart of those reactors at the Ohi station in Fukui Prefecture, to fend off possible summer power shortages, galvanised anti-nuclear protesters, leading to mass demonstrations in Tokyo and other cities.

Any further restarts would not come until next year. The NRA has said it will compile a blueprint of new standards to govern restarts by next March and subject to public discussion.

Noda’s cabinet last month took account of anti-nuclear sentiment in devising a new energy policy that sought to end reliance on nuclear power by the 2030s by fostering renewable energy sources and supporting energy conservation.

But powerful industry lobbies have called for a rethink of policy and within days, ministers appeared to waver on the commitment, saying other factors had to be considered before moving towards abandoning nuclear power within that time frame.

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Maehara says reactors can restart if watchdog gives OK: Japan Today: Japan News and Discussion

reconsider its policy of "zero nukes in 2030s" which was part of the energy and environmental strategy of the Noda administration, as "President Obama wishes it."

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Unfortunately, the question as to their safety has become influenced by political and commercial (the nuclear industry's) interests so that the rigid application of safety assurance is questionable. Would that it was as objective as rocket science.

There is no such thing as 'safe nuclear power', especially in a country that sits on the edge of the Pacific plate.

It should also be noted that, the melt downs at Fukushima had nothing to do with the structural integrity of the buildings. They were caused by falling backup electrical systems after the tsunami swamped the generators and shorted out all the electrics in the plant. This scenario can happen at any plant because the ignorant twits have failed to acknowledge and/or rectify the danger of an electrical failure. They are just now-jobbing the public with structural tests. They are justifying their lack of preparedness by stating the March 11 quake was an unprecedented event. Yes, it was unprecedented, but it should have shown them it can and does happen and they were in no way prepared for it. They were actually very lucky. If there was a full meltdown and explosion in all four reactor buildings it would have made Chernobyl look like a fart in a bath due to the population density.

Wake up Japan! You are like a four-year-old kid playing with a loaded shotgun!

But procedures for going ahead with restarts remain unclear

Shocking. The resolution to a major issue in Japan is "unclear", and no one wants to take ultimate responsibility. Welcome to modern-day Japan and why decades are just slipping by.

Once the plants are started serious study needs to be done to replace them. I like geo-thermal and a law needs to be passed so they can be built. Source, why Iceland who is the expert. This would help both Iceland and Japan. Clean unlimited green energy.

Kurisupisu - absolutely, another nuclear accident would be a disaster - but we can now also see that the Fukushima accident itself was sadly not enough to break the nuclear village's hold over the bureaucracy and the government.

Once they got rid of Kan, who became fiercely anti nuclear after his experience during the March disaster and helped install the puppet pro big business / bureaucracy Noda they seem to have been able to reclaim much of their influence behind the scenes. Noda pays lip service to the "people's wishes" but despite the numerous surveys, town meetings etc which all showed vast majority in Japan are anti nuclear, the groundwork has been laid for the N power to slowly make its comeback. Maehara's statement is just one more indication confirming it as such. The ball is in the Japanese public's court now - either the anti Nuke movement galvanizes again and with the upcoming elections timing forces the politicians to follow the people's wishes or it will not and the nuclear village will have sadly won. Anywhere else in the developed world Fukushima scale disaster would have forced a REAL change of national energy policy and abandonment of N power (viz Italy, Germany etc.) PLUS punishment for the TEPCO style negligence but this is Japan and the cancerous culture of amakudari infested, intertwined business / bureaucracy runs too deep here.

What a sad, shameful farce!

It's clear that if I'll need more than one govt to end the use of nuclear energy, whatever the current one is saying or doing. Within months, there'll be a general election, and most likely a new LDP govt. We don't know the intentions of the LDP on the future of nuclear energy but clearly, looking at their history of always supporting business before anything, it will continue to use nuclear energy, unless the public pressure continues.

The govt states its the responsibility of the new NRA to decide whether a reactor should restart or not. The NRA disagrees, and states its the responsibility of the govt?

Ending of nuclear energy will need time, and the support of all the political parties and the majority of the Diet
Maehara says reactors can restart if watchdog gives OK – Japan Today: Japan News and Discussion

While I agree that Japan has a deeply rule based bureaucratic leadership style and has controlling vested interests pulling the strings, I do not believe that Japan will not change. The reason is that Fukushima is not a temporary problem; it is long term. The effects of the disaster cannot be hidden as all life is and will be irrevocably changed for generations to come. Deaths from the disaster and causal links to radiation are being denied by the government at present. In part there is institutional corroboration here but then numbers are still too low. Hospitals refuse to admit or even treat symptoms of radiation poisoning. Doctors in Fukushima are resigning in unreasonably high numbers and leaving. NHK won’t report these stories nor will the general populace hear about them until the numbers of deformed, sick and dying are just too great in number to ignore then we will see a movement that is truly democratic to end nuclear power.

There’s already an expected increase in deaths due to power generation from fossil fuel, to the tune of over 5000 a year. This guy probably just went through the numbers and made the logical and economical choice to use less fossil fuels.

Unfortunately, the question as to their safety has become influenced by political and commercial (the nuclear industry) interests so that the rigid application of safety assurance is questionable. Would that it was as objective as rocket science.

Questionable safety is better than known danger. Coal, oil, and even gas are KNOWN to be dangerous, to the tune of over 15 excess deaths per TWh, for gas alone. Coal is up at 75-150, and oil is 36 excess deaths. Normalizing to oil generation, we have well over 100,000 extra deaths because of fossil fuels by 2040, which is unacceptable. Compared to an estimated 250 excess deaths over 70 years for Fukushima, it’s not rocket science to see how much more harm comes from power companies using fossil fuels.

Decommissioning all the reactors will be a massive operation and an expensive one with costs mostly likely paid for by the taxpayer. It would take tens of decades, into the next century. Not counting the Fukushima plant, there are about 48 reactors. There’s also the problem of about 20,000 tons of spent nuclear fuel and about 75 tons of weapons grade plutonium. Three of the power companies would go bankrupt without nuclear energy.

Shut down all the reactors which reach the 40 year cycle. Shut down the reactors which don’t meet international safety standards or are in dangerous locations, like the one at Hamaoka. Prior to the nuclear disaster there were 34 reactors operating. I think today, the number of available reactors would be 20 something.

Allow the others to run to their 40 year life cycle, including the three now under construction.

In a way, Basroil has a point, although I don’t think Basroil is getting it. Nuclear power as well as coal, oil, and gas are short-term solutions. Non-polluting, endlessly available solutions are the only long-term solution. Meanwhile, sadly, a lot of people are going to be victims. The only questions are, "How long will it take to accomplish?" and "How many dead litter the wayside?".
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