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## New Cabinet at odds over nation's future nuclear policy

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THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The announcement of Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda's new Cabinet lineup on Oct. 1 has cast further doubt on the government's commitment to eliminating nuclear plants in the country by the 2030s, the goal the Cabinet put forward--but failed to formally adopt--in September.

The government has already taken steps that would neutralize the ambitious goal of weaning Japan from nuclear power, including pushing to restart idled nuclear reactors and indicating it will continue the nuclear fuel cycling program to reuse spent nuclear fuel.

The appointment of former Democratic Party policy chief Seiji Maehara as national policy minister and the retention of Yukio Edano as industry minister are two major signs that the government will continue these policies.

Both Maehara, who will be in charge of reviewing the Atomic Energy Commission, and Edano were central in crafting energy policies in the government and the party.

When the Noda government drew up plans on energy and the environment in September, including the 2030s deadline for no nuclear power, Edano and former national policy minister Motohisa Furukawa worked for the zero-uke policy to be specifically stated.

But Edano and others who advocated shutting down all nuclear plants as early as possible buckled when faced with growing calls within the government and the party to consider opposition from the business community and people in areas hosting plants and to listen to concerns from the United States.

In the end, the Cabinet did not grant its approval for the new plans, leaving wiggle room for the government to retain nuclear plants. Furukawa's name was not seen in the new Cabinet lineup.

In the new Cabinet, Makiko Tanaka, science and technology minister, is in charge of the Monju prototype fast breeder reactor in Tsuruga, Fukui Prefecture, a key facility in the nuclear fuel cycle program.

"I will follow the past policies," Tanaka said at a news conference on Oct. 1. "It is desirable for (the facility) to be headed for an end, while studies there will be continued, not just given up."

Earlier in the day, Tanaka told reporters that the zero-nuclear policy "is a high goal and not easy to achieve." She added that the goal is "inconsistent" with the nuclear fuel cycle program.

Maehara, also at the news conference, said in response, "The word 'inconsistent' is somewhat extreme," underscoring the discrepancy in views within the administration.

Environment Minister Hiroyuki Nagahama, who is also in charge of the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, will handle operations related to decommissioning the reactors and the decision of choosing construction sites for interim facilities to store soil contaminated with radioactive waste.

While his predecessor, Goshi Hosono, built trusting relationships with local residents by frequently visiting Fukushima Prefecture, Nagahama will have to make those same kinds of efforts from scratch.

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