

Tokyo Power Company President Urges Retaining Reactors

By HIROKO TABUCHI
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TOKYO — Japan would be foolish to abandon nuclear power, the operator of the ravaged Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station warned Wednesday, saying the company had not ruled out reopening two of the plant's less-damaged reactors as well as four others at a nearby sister site.

The country is expected to outline a new energy policy, prompted by the disaster at Fukushima, and one option the government has explored would phase out all nuclear power by 2030.

Public anxiety over nuclear safety has helped keep all but two of Japan's 50 remaining reactors offline, and the country's nascent anti-nuclear movement has demanded an even more immediate shutdown.

But energy prices would soar, the country would become dangerously dependent on Middle Eastern oil and its greenhouse gas emissions would surge if it went nuclear-free — especially if it did so immediately, said Naomi Hirose, president of the Tokyo Electric Power Company. And without a swift restart of the remaining reactors, the company's finances, already crippled by compensation claims after the Fukushima disaster, would worsen further, he warned.

"We understand that local residents might ask whether they are really all right with letting us operate nuclear reactors again after the accident," he said. "But zero nuclear is a very dangerous option. We need to step back and think of the wider consequences of giving up nuclear power."

Tokyo Electric has not given up on winning local residents' approval to reopen the reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi plant that survived the 2011 earthquake and tsunami as well as four other reactors 16 kilometers (10 miles) away, Mr. Hirose said Wednesday.

More urgent is the restarting of a third nuclear plant run by Tokyo Electric at Kashiwazaki-Kariwa, about 124 miles from the Fukushima site on Japan's northwest coast, he said. The governor of Niigata Prefecture, where that plant is situated, remains opposed to restarting any of the seven reactors.

Mr. Hirose is part of a chorus of voices urging Japan not to turn away from nuclear power. Japan's largest and most influential business lobby, the Nippon Keidanren, has also warned that a nuclear shutdown would create an energy shortage that would cripple economic growth. Japan once relied on nuclear power for about 30 percent of its electricity.

Nuclear opponents have argued that Japan can make up for lost capacity by temporarily shifting to fossil fuels while the country races to expand alternative sources of energy. Japan made it through a sweltering summer with just two reactors running, they say — proof that the nation could do away with reactors altogether.

But Mr. Hirose said power companies had averted blackouts this summer only by firing up old oil and natural gas stations and by importing fuel and generators at great cost. He said

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energy sources like solar and wind were still unreliable and would be feasible only with backup energy from conventional power stations like those that Tokyo Electric operates.

“When people think of these new energy sources, they only think of best-case scenarios,” Mr. Hirose said. “But we have a responsibility to provide a cheap and stable source of power. We have to be realistic.”

The company’s mission is to make sure that a nuclear accident never happens again, Mr. Hirose said.

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