

Thursday, Oct. 4, 2012

U.S. urges Japan to keep stored plutonium to a minimum

Kyodo

The United States has urged Japan to keep the amount of plutonium it stores at a minimum, following the recent shift in energy strategy that aims to end atomic power generation by the 2030s, several Japanese and U.S. government sources said Wednesday.

Washington has aired concerns over the possibility of nuclear proliferation since the government decided last month to continue to reprocess spent nuclear fuel even though it appears inconsistent with the zero nuclear reliance target, the sources said.

The United States has said keeping the fuel recycling policy, despite the planned phaseout of nuclear power generation, would undermine the basis of the current Japan-U.S. civilian nuclear cooperation pact, under which Washington approves Tokyo's spent fuel reprocessing, according to the sources.

The 1988 accord promotes bilateral technological cooperation in the nuclear energy area. Washington gave the green light to Japan's commercial use of fuel reprocessing technologies that can be diverted to military use based on Tokyo's promise in the international arena not to keep excess plutonium.

Japan is the only non-nuclear state in the world that has a commercial nuclear fuel reprocessing facility. What appears to be a contradictory energy policy could adversely affect negotiations between Tokyo and Washington to revise the nuclear cooperation pact by 2018.

Shortly before the government decided on the new energy strategy on Sept. 14, Seiji Maehara, then policy chief of the ruling Democratic Party of Japan, and Akihisa Nagashima, then special adviser to Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda for foreign and defense matters, briefed senior U.S. officials on the fresh policy. U.S. Deputy Secretary of Energy Daniel Poneman and other officials raised concerns about the increase of plutonium, which can't be reused in Japan under the zero nuclear reliance policy, the sources said.

They were also worried that fossil fuel prices would soar in the global market if the world's third-largest economy abandons nuclear power generation and depends more on such fuels.

The officials also pointed out that the nuclear phaseout would hamper exports of nuclear power generation technologies by Japan-U.S. joint ventures to the rest of the world, giving advantage to rival exporters Russia and China, according to the sources.

Washington expressed particular concern over the issue of plutonium and called on Tokyo, which has adhered to international nonproliferation rules, to keep the amount of the weapons-grade fuel at a minimum.

The United States requested that Japan flexibly implement the new energy strategy and that the Noda Cabinet refrain from adopting it at a Cabinet meeting, the sources said.

Poll Most read stories Editors' picks

A piece of your mind

A dangerous ride?

Police in Japan are [considering ways to prevent what they say are unsafe cycling practices](#). What's your take?

- The police should relax. Cycling is safer in Tokyo than in most big cities. Wrong way, no lights, talking on the phone? Tokyo cyclists are indeed dangerous riders.**
- All cyclists should be tested and licensed, just like motorcyclists. Cities need to build more cycle-friendly roads. That's the smartest route.**
- I'm afraid this plan will discourage people from cycling.**

VOTE

Total Votes : 214

[View past polls](#)

Before the Fukushima disaster that led to the reversal of nuclear energy policy, the government had planned to reprocess all spent nuclear fuel and reuse extracted plutonium and uranium as reactor fuel at 16 to 18 light-water reactors.

Based on the bilateral nuclear cooperation pact, Japan obtained prior approval of the United States to use fuel made of U.S.-provided uranium and to reprocess fuel spent at U.S.-made nuclear reactors.

 PRINT

 E-MAIL



We welcome your opinions. [Click to send a message to the editor.](#)

The Japan Times
(C) All rights reserved

Article 5 of 15 in National news

[◀ Previous](#) [Next ▶](#)

[Back to top ▲](#)

[About us](#) | [Work for us](#) | [Contact us](#) | [Privacy policy](#) | [Link policy](#) | [Registration FAQ](#)
[Advertise in japantimes.co.jp.](#)

This site has been optimized for modern browsers. Please make sure that Javascript is enabled in your browser's preferences.
The Japan Times Ltd. All rights reserved.