

NEWS

Japan Still Struggling to Control Crippled Nuclear Plant

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Steve Herman | Tokyo



Photo: VOA - S. Herman

Police herd marchers along the curb as the streets are not blocked off for the demonstration in Tokyo, Japan, April 16, 2011

Small and peaceful anti-nuclear protests continue to be staged in Japan. The demonstrations are being held as troubles continue at and around the Fukushima-1 nuclear power plant in the northeastern part of the country. It has been leaking radiation into the air and sea since it was severely damaged by a magnitude 9.0 quake and resulting tsunami more than a month ago.



The operator of the crippled nuclear power plant in Fukushima has begun dropping into the Pacific Ocean sandbags filled with an absorbent

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to try to reduce the danger from radiation. The bags are filled with zeolite, better known as the active material sprinkled in cat litter boxes to absorb odors. In this case, zeolite is meant to take up cesium that has been detected at high levels along the Fukushima coast.

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On shore, the Tokyo Electric Power Company, known as TEPCO, is still struggling, more than a month after the Fukushima-1 plant was damaged by an earthquake and tsunami, to restore automatic cooling facilities for several reactors.

In Tokyo on Saturday, several hundred demonstrators peacefully marched past a TEPCO building. Some were dressed as vegetables, others were adorned with or carried produce.

The protesters chant "vegetables are more important than nuclear power. We don't need nuclear plants, we don't need radiation."

One of the participants, Naomi Saito from neighboring Saitama prefecture, lamented the small number of people who have taken to the streets in protest since March 11. But Saito said she understands why that is the case in a resource-poor country heavily reliant on atomic energy where more than 50 nuclear plants have been built in the past 45 years.

"We're all in a very dangerous situation because of atomic [power]. But other Japanese think nuclear [power] is very important, so I feel very sad," said Saito.

Japan's government on Saturday ordered 13 nuclear plant operators to inspect and reinforce outside power links to avoid earthquake-triggered outages similar to one on March 11 in Fukushima.

The urgency of that directive was highlighted when a 5.9 magnitude earthquake jolted eastern Japan on Saturday.

Radiation leaking from the Fukushima plant has forced tens of thousands of people in the prefecture to flee their homes. It has also contaminated crops and fishing waters, and regenerated global concern about the safety of nuclear power plants.

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