

## Treating radioactive water the key at Fukushima plant, TEPCO chief says



Toshio Nishizawa, new president of Tokyo Electric Power Co. (Toshiyuki Matsumoto)

Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s biggest challenge in bringing the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant under control is treating radioactive water accumulating in the compound, TEPCO's new president, Toshio Nishizawa, said.

Nishizawa assumed the post on June 28 at the company's shareholders' meeting.

In an interview with The Asahi Shimbun, Nishizawa said he understands the frustrations of victims of the disaster and the dire conditions for workers at the plant. But he emphasized the company's determination to resolve the nuclear crisis by all means possible.

Excerpts from the interview follow:

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Question: What is your assessment of TEPCO's road map to end the nuclear crisis at the plant?

Answer: We are making progress step by step, although I am aware that people's assessments vary. The first step spans the period through the middle of July. During that time, we are going to steadily reduce the amount of radioactivity.

Cooling and bringing the reactors to a stable condition and water management are key. If we can run a system to treat contaminated water and recirculate it to cool the reactors, that will be proof of our progress.

Q: What are your concerns?

A: Our immediate target is the treatment of radioactive water. It is a task we are tackling for the first time in Japan, but we are doing it with cooperation from companies overseas.

However, we are worried about rainwater, which could prove the biggest obstacle in our battle against contaminated water.

Q: People who have evacuated from crisis-stricken areas are eager to return home.

A: We are going to follow through with a cold shutdown in the second step, spanning from September to December, by all means possible.

For those people, our road map is serving as milestone (for their reconstruction plans). We have to meet their expectations at any cost.

Also, we are going to release information on the status of the plant, including that on problems we encounter.

Q: Some critics argue that the accident was a human-generated disaster.

A: While the government set up a special panel to investigate what went wrong at the plant, we also established an in-

house panel for the same purpose. We want to look into the behavior of the workers and their operations as well as the preparedness of our facilities and equipment against a disaster. We plan to release an interim report by the year-end.

I went to the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant after the accident and am aware that the head of the plant and all the workers there are working in dire conditions. We are in a situation that was not previously covered by a manual against disasters.

But we are keeping details of the situation we are going through as a record, which we believe will be of some use to the world.

Q: TEPCO had insisted that nuclear power plants were absolutely safe. Is the accident, therefore, something you never expected?

A: I want to refrain from making remarks not based on the findings of our investigations.

Q: If their safety is secured, will you put into operation the remaining two reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 plant and the Fukushima No. 2 nuclear plant?

A: Our Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in Niigata Prefecture gained a safety clearance by the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency after we carried out checks based on NISA instructions. We have also reported on the Fukushima No. 2 plant.

But that does not suffice in today's Japan. We will have to decide the operation of those reactors in accordance with opinions of local governments.

Q: A bill to help compensate people affected by the nuclear accident was submitted to the Diet. What do you think of the bill?

A: We hope the bill will be passed for the sake of the victims. We cannot initiate action unless a structure for compensation is established.

Q: Can't you pay compensation to the victims without a structure?

A: We could be accused of acting in betrayal without a structure.

Q: Critics are demanding additional restructuring measures by TEPCO.

A: We believe that we have already presented a sufficient number of restructuring steps. We certainly hope that a government special panel to evaluate our company's assets and financial and management situations will give a fair appraisal of our efforts.

Q: If you cannot operate nuclear power plants, you will have to spend more to procure fuel for thermal power plants. Do you plan to raise electricity rates?

A: I am not in a position to comment on that. We have to make drastic streamlining efforts first.

The main sources of fuel to run our plants will be liquefied natural gas and coal for the time being. Regarding nuclear power generation, we hope to operate some reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant if we can gain the understanding of local governments.

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