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Japan begins nuclear charm offensive

(AFP) – 4 days ago

TOKYO — Japan began a campaign Sunday to convince communities hosting nuclear reactors to let operations resume, with several local governments blocking nuclear power generation after the atomic crisis in Fukushima.

Central government officials held a briefing in Saga prefecture, where two reactors at the Genkai power plant are among several across the country that were halted for regular checks when a huge quake and tsunami hit on March 11.

Local officials have since withheld routine consent for operations to resume, citing safety concerns after the tsunami triggered a crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi plant, which has leaked radiation into air, soil and sea.

Sunday's briefing was broadcast online, but only seven government-selected local residents were allowed to attend, while the meeting venue was not disclosed to the public.

In a press conference after the 90-minute briefing, one of the seven complained that it had been "way too short".

Another participant said: "Officials used many technical terms that were too difficult to understand. Since I didn't understand, I cannot agree with their explanation."

Dozens of protesters demonstrated outside the building against the government's nuclear policy.

"This is a programme designed to lead to an approval for the resumption of operations of the Genkai reactors. We cannot accept that," one of the protesters, Hatsumi Ishimaru, 59, was quoted by Kyodo News as saying.

Nuclear energy makes up about a third of Japan's overall energy supply, but the government has faced stiff criticism from the public on the issue since the Fukushima crisis forced the evacuation of thousands of local residents.

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International Atomic Energy Agency inspection team members looking at the unit three reactor building of Fukushima (AFP/TEPCO/File)

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