

Fukushima-is-still-news

- vol. 9 -

**Practical Problems
For The Japanese Population
2018-2019**



Odile Girard



Référence bibliographique

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INTRODUCTION

J'ai « découvert » l'écologie au début des années 70, croisant dans le même temps la pollution, les luttes paysannes et la malbouffe, la médecine qui avait (déjà) perdu son âme, les mouvements sociaux et bien sûr le nucléaire qui a occupé une grande partie de ma vie.

Après la catastrophe de mars 2011 au Japon, j'ai suivi chaque jour une partie des grands journaux japonais anglophones pour essayer de sauvegarder un maximum d'articles ayant trait à Fukushima. L'idée était de conserver une sorte d'archive accessible à tous, qu'ils soient écrivains, journalistes ou tout simplement intéressés.

Le blog « [Fukushima-is-still-news](#) » a été poursuivi jusqu'en 2019. Ci-dessous, la conclusion parue le jour où j'ai décidé d'arrêter mon blog.

End of March 2019: Time to stop this blog

29 Mars 2019

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I have been collecting and spreading information on the Fukushima disaster for more than 8 years.

More than ever I am convinced that the name of my blog « Fukushima-is-still-news » was aptly chosen. Or perhaps I should have called it « Fukushima should still be news ». What I'm getting at is that I know the disaster is going on and we cannot simply forget Fukushima and turn the page. But the mode of action I chose 8 years ago has its limits and it is time for me to stop this blog.

I don't want the contents to be lost, so I will try and publish the lot with the Éditions de Fukushima so that the information remains available online.

Good bye for now. I am not doing a disappearing act. I'm still there tracking what's going on in the world of nukes.

C'est maintenant chose faite. Le blog *fukushima-is-still-news* est désormais disponible aux Éditions de Fukushima. Une fois de plus merci à mon ami Pierre, qui m'a convaincue à l'époque de tenir ce blog et m'a aidée à le lancer.

Odile Girard

Avertissement

La mise en page de dizaines de milliers de pages étant trop fastidieuse, nous avons préféré dans un premier temps éditer les volumes 7 à 16 sans mise en page particulière plutôt que de risquer de ne jamais les éditer. Chacun de ces livres est donc, dans la version présente, constitué des articles du blog copiés de manière brute. Les articles sont disposés a priori chronologiquement. Nous nous excusons donc pour l'absence de table des matières. La recherche peut toutefois facilement être effectuée par mot clé avec la fonction CTRL + F

Le présent volume est le neuvième d'une collection de 16 ouvrages qui sont édités petit à petit.

Vol. 1 : Daiichi Nuclear Plant (2012-2014)

Vol. 2 : Daiichi Nuclear Plant (2015-2019)

**Vol. 3 : Radioactive Fallout And Waste,
No.4 Fuel Removal,
Nuclear Workers,
and UN Conference**

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and New Techniques - Alternatives & Renewables**

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Sad story

December 31, 2016 (Mainichi Japan)

Doctor who stayed in Fukushima after meltdowns thought to have died in fire

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161231/p2a/00m/0na/011000c>

HIRONO, Fukushima -- A doctor who chose to stay in an area affected by the Fukushima nuclear crisis and continued to provide medical services may have died in a fire at his home here, police said.

At around 10:30 p.m. on Dec. 30, a fire broke out at the home of Hideo Takano, 81, director of Takano Hospital in Hirono, Fukushima Prefecture. Part of the wooden structure was destroyed in the blaze, local police said.

The body of a man was found in one of the rooms. Investigators believe the corpse is that of Takano, whom they have been unable to contact, and are trying to confirm the identity of the body.

A security guard at the hospital, located on the same grounds as Takano's home, noticed smoke coming out of the home and alerted a local fire station. Takano had lived alone at the address.

A hospital official told the Mainichi Shimbun that until recently, Takano had treated patients as usual.

Takano Hospital is situated about 22 kilometers south of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. Takano chose to stay home and continued to treat inpatients at his hospital even after the town of Hirono was designated as a zone in which residents were urged to prepare for evacuation following the outbreak of the nuclear disaster. He also examined local residents and those engaged in the decommissioning of the nuclear plant.

Fukushima evacuees ring the bell

January 1, 2017

Fukushima nuclear evacuees toll bell for New Year

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161231_16/

Evacuees from the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident have rung a bell at a Buddhist temple in their hometown to welcome the New Year and to pray for restoration from the disaster.

About 100 former residents of Namie Town gathered at Daisho-ji Temple in Kitakiyohashi district before noon on Saturday, New Year's Eve.

Head priest Atsuo Aota read out a sutra before the evacuees, now living in and outside the prefecture, took turns ringing the bell.

Such ceremonies usually take place on the night of New Year's Eve in Japan. But it is no longer possible in Namie as nighttime access to the town is restricted due to evacuation orders that have been in effect since the nuclear accident.

Aota, who is an evacuee himself, said he prayed for the happiness of the evacuees. He added that he will keep the bell-ringing tradition alive in his hometown.

One of the participants, Shigeko Watanabe, said she was glad to have tolled the bell in her home community. She said people are still not allowed to live in the town but that she hopes its former residents will retain their bonds through the bell-ringing and other temple rituals.

What will happen to Hirono hospital?

January 6, 2017

Death of doctor in Fukushima disaster zone hospital throws patients' futures into question

by Tomoko Otake
Staff Writer

A 120-bed hospital in the town of Hirono, Fukushima Prefecture, which has been on the frontline of efforts to restore communities annihilated by the March 2011 quake, tsunami and nuclear calamity, has been thrown into crisis following the unexpected death last week of its aging and sole full-time doctor.

Dr. Hideo Takano, 81-year-old director of the privately run Takano Hospital, died from burns after a fire broke out at his home on the hospital grounds on the night of Dec. 30. The police are investigating the cause of the fire, but it is being treated as an accident.

Hirono Mayor Satoshi Endo told The Japan Times on Friday that the town is doing its best to keep the hospital and its 100 inpatients — about 50 bed-ridden elderly patients and 50 people in its psychiatric ward — alive.

The town plans to pay for the accommodation and transportation costs of volunteer doctors who will fill Takano's shifts through the end of January. After that, the hospital's fate is uncertain.

Set up in 1980 originally as a psychiatric hospital some 20 km south of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the facility has played a central role in maintaining the welfare of residents not only in town, but across the Futaba region as the only hospital operating since the nuclear disaster.

The crisis prompted many of the town's residents and even its government to evacuate. Hirono's evacuation orders were lifted in September 2011 and residents have been slowly making their way back, but the town's population — currently about 3,000 — remains less than 60 percent of pre-3/11 levels.

The population is expected to climb back to 4,000 by April, Endo said.

In the more than five years since the disaster began, Takano Hospital didn't close for a single day because the late director decided its frail inpatients could not be evacuated.

Because the other five hospitals in the region shut down, Takano Hospital is the only institution providing medical care not only to its residents, but also to 3,500 or so workers residing there for decontamination and decommissioning work related to the core meltdowns.

Mayor Endo stressed that the hospital needs to survive as it is part of the town's basic infrastructure and will be necessary if residents are to return.

"The hospital has played a huge role in the community by ceaselessly providing care," Endo said. "If it goes, these patients will have no other place to go."

Takano, who was a psychiatrist, had been a "super-human" figure, tirelessly tending to the needs of patients despite his advanced age, said Akihiko Ozaki, a 31-year-old surgeon at Minamisoma Municipal General Hospital some 60 km north.

Ozaki is spearheading a drive to save Takano Hospital, and thanks to the efforts of him and others, the hospital has secured about 25 doctors from across the country to work as unpaid volunteers through the end of the month.

But the hospital still urgently needs a permanent full-time doctor to fill Takano's shoes, Ozaki said.

"Technically speaking, a hospital operating without a director is illegal," Ozaki said. "Patients will suffer, as a system based on various different doctors coming and going is incapable of providing continuous care. We need a new full-time doctor as soon as possible."

But it will be no easy task to find a replacement, Ozaki said, adding that the hospital was barely afloat under Takano, who worked for little pay and had next to no time off.

Mio Takano, his daughter and head manager of the hospital, said the facility has struggled financially since 3/11. She said government officials have long spurned her calls for help on the grounds that taxpayer money cannot be used by a private hospital.

Takano said that the quake changed everything and that the hospital's running costs have surged because it needs to hire more staffers to maintain the same quality of care.

Before the quake, many nurses could ask parents or in-laws to take care of their children, she explained. But the disaster forced many families to separate and workers with children can no longer rely on elderly family members, she said, noting that the hospital thus needs to hire more people to work night and weekend shifts.

"Such lifestyle changes have meant it is more costly to keep the same level of care," she said.

Takano added that, nearly six years on, the nuclear disaster is far from over.

"This is not a problem of an aging doctor dying in an accident, throwing a hospital into crisis. Situations like ours could happen to any other hospitals in areas that host nuclear power plants."

January 4, 2016

Volunteer doctors to be sought for Fukushima hospital after director dies in fire

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170104/p2a/00m/0na/004000c>

HIRONO, Fukushima -- The body of a man found in a home here after a fire was identified as that of a doctor who continued to treat patients in an area affected by the Fukushima nuclear disaster, local police announced on Jan. 3. The doctor's death prompted the local town to seek volunteer doctors from across the country.

- **【Related】** Doctor who stayed in Fukushima after meltdowns thought to have died in fire

Hideo Takano, 81 -- who was head of Takano Hospital in the town of Hirono in Fukushima Prefecture -- died as a result of the fire which partially burned his home on Dec. 30. The corpse was confirmed to be that of Takano by Futaba Police Station, following DNA testing.

The doctor was particularly noted for his bravery following the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant meltdowns in March 2011 -- because he decided not to flee, and continued to attend to his patients' needs at the only hospital close to the power plant, within Futaba county, that remained operational after the accident.

Currently, Takano Hospital treats patients who have returned to the area, as well as people involved in nuclear reactor decommissioning work, but the hospital now faces a staff shortage problem following the death of Dr. Takano, who was the only full-time doctor at the institution.

With this in mind, the Hirono Municipal Government announced on Jan. 3 that it will bring in doctors until Jan. 9 from nearby medical institutions such as Minamisoma City General Hospital, also in Fukushima Prefecture. The doctors will help treat approximately 100 inpatients, in addition to providing outpatient care. Furthermore, a group to support the hospital, called "Takano Byoin o shiensuru kai," has been set up by voluntary doctors at the hospital, and there have also been appeals on Facebook, asking for support from doctors.

The Hirono Municipal Government plans to recruit volunteer doctors from across Japan -- in an attempt to maintain the town's medical care system -- and has offered incentives such as free accommodation and travel. A representative at the town hall stated that, "Takano Hospital patients reside far and wide across Futaba," and that the town will request support from both the Fukushima Prefectural Government and the central government.

Takano Hospital has set up a commemorative page on its website in memory of Dr. Takano -- who devoted his life to medical care in the region -- stating that it plans to "carry on the will of Dr. Takano and continue to provide medical care in the region."

(Related link)

The Facebook page of "Takano Byoin o shiensuru kai," or a group to support Takano Hospital:
<https://www.facebook.com/savepatientakano/>

see also: January 4, 2017 (NHK video)

<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/videos/20170105161403595/>

Devoted Fukushima Doctor Dies

Voluntary evacuees: What now?

January 6, 2016

Voluntary nuclear evacuees to face housing assistance gap

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170106/p2a/00m/0na/007000c>

Nine of Japan's 47 prefectures are planning to provide financial and other support to voluntary evacuees from the Fukushima nuclear disaster as Fukushima Prefecture is set to terminate its free housing services to them at the end of March, the Mainichi Shimbun has learned.

- 【Related】 Schoolteacher calls Fukushima evacuee pupil 'germ'
- 【Related】 Family of Fukushima woman who killed herself to sue TEPCO
- 【Related】 Fukushima population falls by 110,000 after nuclear disaster

Fukushima Prefecture's move will affect more than 10,000 households that voluntarily evacuated within and outside Fukushima Prefecture in the wake of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant meltdowns in March 2011. As many prefectures other than those nine prefectures are set to provide less generous assistance, voluntary evacuees will face a housing assistance gap depending on where they live or will live hereafter.

As of the end of October last year, there were 26,601 people in 10,524 households who were receiving Fukushima Prefecture's free housing services after they voluntarily evacuated from the nuclear disaster, according to the Fukushima Prefectural Government. Of them, 13,844 people in 5,230 households were living outside Fukushima Prefecture.

Those voluntary evacuees have received full rent subsidies from Fukushima Prefecture for public and private housing units they live in under the Disaster Relief Act after fleeing from the city of Fukushima and other areas that lie outside the nuclear evacuation zone. While that has effectively been the only public assistance they receive, Fukushima Prefecture announced in June 2015 that it will terminate the service in March this year on the grounds that "decontamination work and infrastructure recovery have been set." In a nationwide survey conducted by the Mainichi Shimbun after October last year, Tottori, Hokkaido and four other prefectures said they will provide housing units for free to those voluntary evacuees, while three other prefectures said they will provide rent and other subsidies to them. Fukushima Prefecture was not covered in the survey.

Many of the other prefectures said they will provide assistance based no more than on the central government's request that the conditions for accommodating voluntary evacuees into public housing be relaxed.

The Tottori Prefectural Government will provide prefecture-run housing units to voluntary evacuees for free and will also subsidize all of the rent for private rental housing. The measures will be applied to not only those who already live in Tottori but to also those who will move into the prefecture.

Yamagata Prefecture will provide housing for prefectural employees for free to low-income evacuees, while Hokkaido, Nara and Ehime prefectures will waive the rent for evacuee households living in prefecture-run housing units. Kyoto Prefecture will exempt the rent for prefecture-run housing units up to six years after move-in, and will allow evacuees to continue living in such units after April this year until contract expiration. Niigata Prefecture will provide 10,000 yen a month to low-income evacuees living in private rental housing in order to prevent their children from having to change schools.

"Evacuees have been feeling anxiety about their housing. (As a local government plagued by the aging and declining population) we also expect them to live in our prefecture permanently," the Tottori Prefectural Government stated in its response to the survey.

Most of the other prefectures will set up a priority quota for accommodating voluntary evacuees into public housing units, but they will face severe requirements, such as the need to move out after some time. "The central government should consider responses in a unified manner," noted the Iwate Prefecture Government in the survey.

Imari beef for scholarship students

January 8, 2017

NPO members donate 12 million yen in taxes to anti-nuclear city

By SHINYA HARAGUCHI/ Staff Writer

IMARI, Saga Prefecture--In seeking something scholarship recipients can sink their teeth into, five staff members of a nonprofit organization in Tokyo searched for a worthy recipient of their tax payments.

Impressed with the Imari mayor's anti-nuclear stance, the staffers contributed 12 million yen (about \$102,600) of their tax money to the city government here.

In return, they'll receive about 380 kilograms of delicious Imari beef to distribute to scholarship winners, including many affected by the Kumamoto earthquakes.

The five used the "Furusato nozei" (Hometown tax) system, which allows people to divert part of their local tax payments to their favorite local governments. In return, many of those governments send local specialties to donors.

The NPO, named JBC CSR Fund, a scholarship organization, plans to distribute the meat to 223 high school students, including 129 impacted by the powerful earthquakes in Kumamoto last April.

The NPO gives scholarships to high school students who have academic capabilities but are in financial difficulties due to their family circumstances.

The organization considered presenting the beef it would receive to scholarship recipients by utilizing the Furusato nozei system. In consideration, it chose Imari, a production center of the brand beef.

The NPO decided on the city as its mayor, Yoshikazu Tsukabe, expressed opposition to the restart of the Genkai nuclear power plant in Genkai, Saga Prefecture, in 2016. Imari is located within a 30-kilometer radius of the nuclear plant.

On Jan. 6, Tamotsu Sugunami, a staff member of the office for the fund, visited the Imari government and handed over the documentation for the donation to Tsukabe.

While referring to an interview that ran in the Jan. 3 Asahi Shimbun in which Tsukabe expressed his opposition to the restart, Sugunami complimented the mayor, saying, "We quickly became fans of Imari." In response, Tsukabe said, "I was encouraged, although I tend to be isolated (due to my opposition to the nuclear plant)."

The mayor also said, "Once the nuclear power plant is restarted, it will be difficult to stop again. As the plant's operations are suspended now, it is time to switch to anti-nuclear policies."

He added, "I will deliver delicious Imari beef to high school students (through the NPO)."

Each of the 223 students will be able to enjoy about 1.7 kilograms of beef.

Highschool students at Fukushima plant

January 4, 2017

Students Visit Crippled Fukushima Plant

<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/nhknewsline/nuclearwatch/studentsvisitcrippledfukushimaplant/>

A group of high school students in Japan has visited the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. They're **the first minors to be admitted to the site**, and they're hoping the experience will help them contribute to the recovery of the surrounding community.

The students spent months preparing for their visit to the site of the 2011 nuclear disaster, and have been checking radiation levels around the region.

"I wanted to know how the workers feel, how far the decommissioning work has progressed, and what problems they have. I thought it would be best to see it with my own eyes, because there are some things you can't understand just from the media," says Miku Norii, who is in her second year and is a member of her school's science club.

After much preparation, and after securing permission from their parents, Miku and the other students headed to the plant. Radiation levels in most of the areas have fallen, so they were able to wear ordinary clothes.

But they did wear gloves and covered their shoes to avoid picking up contaminants. They carried devices that measured how much radiation they were being exposed to, and they stayed inside the bus as it blocks some of the radiation.

The first thing that caught their attention was the massive number of water tanks. They learned that contaminated water is building up at the site.

"Are there walls around the area where the tanks are lined up?" Miku asks.

"There are walls around it and a roof over it to prevent rainwater from getting in as much as possible," a TEPCO worker says.

They saw the reactor building left damaged by a hydrogen explosion. Miku learned that radiation levels near the reactor buildings remain high, so workers need to wear protective gear.

"They need to wear heavy equipment that close to the reactor building," Miku said.

Seeing the damaged reactor building was an encounter with harsh reality. The students could see why the job of decommissioning the plant could take 40 years, or until they reach middle age.

At the end of the tour, the students checked their total radiation exposure. They were relieved to see it was still within the safety guideline.

We caught up with Miku a month after she visited the plant to find out what lasting impression the trip had on her.

"I had done some research before going. But that's different than first-hand experience. When I saw the plant, I was able to feel its size, and the atmosphere. I'm now keenly aware that this is an issue we have to face squarely," Miku says. "I think we'll have opportunities to talk to people, both in and outside Fukushima -- and I hope we can convey our feelings, in our own words."

After our interview, Miku and her friends traveled to an area where residents had been evacuated. They continue to search for the hope that someday their beloved Fukushima will be fully restored.

Okuma (Fukushima Pref.) hopes for returnees in 2017

January 7, 2017

Evacuated Fukushima town planning for residents' return in fall 2017

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170107/p2a/00m/0na/008000c>

FUKUSHIMA -- A prefectural town that has been entirely evacuated since the March 2011 Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant meltdown is aiming to have some areas reopened to residents in autumn this year, town officials have told the Mainichi Shimbun.

- **【Related】 Fukushima & Nuclear Power**

Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, is currently covered by three classes of evacuation order. The town's eastern region and much of the northern region are designated as "difficult to return zones," while the southwestern and western regions are categorized as "restricted residency" and "evacuation order cancellation preparation" zones, respectively. Okuma officials are aiming to have the latter two designations rescinded, opening the way for residents to move back in. **If successful, Okuma would be the first of the two municipalities hosting the plant (the other is the town of Futaba) to allow residents back.**

Okuma is also planning to designate one small area as the town's "recovery base," and build a new municipal office in fiscal 2019.

According to Okuma officials, they intend to allow residents back into the evacuation zones to sleep in their homes as early as August. However, the program will not be implemented in the "difficult to return zone."

Most of the area covered by the two other evacuation order types are mountain wilderness, with just 384 registered residents -- 3.6 percent of Okuma's population -- in the districts of Ogawara and Nakayashiki. Decontamination work in both districts was completed in March 2014, and basic services including water and electricity have been restored. The Okuma Municipal Government is set to discuss the exact date when residents will be allowed back with central government officials and the town assembly.

Okuma is planning to build its new town hall, a seniors' home, and public housing for some 3,000 residents and Fukushima nuclear plant decommissioning workers, among other facilities, in its some 40-hectare "recovery base" in the town's Ogawara district. Municipal government staff began working weekdays at a contact office there in April 2016. Meanwhile, large solar power installations as well as dormitories for Tokyo Electric Power Co. employees have already been built around the planned "recovery base" area.

Raising funds for Hirono hospital

January 10, 2017

Town near Fukushima No. 1 raising funds to bring in doctors for lone hospital's 100 patients

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/01/10/national/town-near-fukushima-no-1-raising-funds-invite-volunteer-doctors-care-sole-hospitals-100-patients/#.WHTPNn2Dmos>

Staff Report

The town of Hirono, Fukushima Prefecture, whose only hospital is in crisis following the death last month of its sole full-time doctor, has launched a crowdfunding campaign to solicit donations from the public. Hideo Takano, the 81-year-old director of the private hospital, died in a fire at his home on the hospital grounds on Dec. 30, leaving 100 inpatients in limbo.

It is the only hospital operating in the region of Futaba, which hosts the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. The other five hospitals in the area shut down in the wake of the March 2011 quake, tsunami and nuclear disasters.

The crowdfunding campaign (readyfor.jp/projects/hirono-med) was started Monday with a goal of ¥2.5 million to help finance the town's cost of inviting volunteer doctors to fulfill Takano's duties through the end of March.

As of Tuesday afternoon, the total had already exceeded ¥3 million.

The money will be used to cover the transportation and accommodations costs of the otherwise unpaid volunteers.

So far, more than 30 doctors from across the country have offered to help. Donations can be made starting from ¥3,000 and they are partially tax-deductible, as they use the *furusato nozei* (hometown tax donation) system, which allows taxpayers to divert tax payments to municipalities of their choice.

New school opens in Higashi-Matsushima

January 10, 2017

6 years later, tsunami-hit town welcomes new school

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201701100037.html>

By YOSHINOBU MOTEGI/ Staff Writer

Students, parents and local residents were invited to see the new Miyanomori Elementary School building on Jan. 9 in Higashi-Matsushima, Miyagi Prefecture. An inauguration ceremony was held in the school's gym on the same day, ahead of the resumption of classes the following day. (Yosuke Fukudome)



Students, parents and local residents were invited to see the new Miyanomori Elementary School building on Jan. 9 in Higashi-Matsushima, Miyagi Prefecture. An inauguration ceremony was held in the school's gym on the same day, ahead of the resumption of classes the following day. (Yosuke Fukudome)

HIGASHI-MATSUSHIMA, Miyagi Prefecture--Schoolchildren welcomed a fresh start to the year on Jan. 10 in a bright and stylish new school building here that replaces one destroyed by the tsunami almost six years ago.

The facility, sporting a modern design that doesn't look like a school, was completed on Jan. 9 in the coastal Nobiru district, which was devastated in the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

City-run Miyanomori Elementary School was formally founded last spring with the merging of Nobiru and Miyato elementary schools.

The school, which sits on the site near the former Nobiru Elementary School, was completed and inaugurated on Jan. 9, just in time for the start of the final term of the senior students' sixth and final elementary school year.

Some of those students had until now known only the temporary pre-fab building that had been pressed into service since they entered elementary school.

"The old pre-fab building had poor soundproofing, so we had to walk slowly in the corridors," said sixth-grader Koharu Abe. "But now we do not have to worry about it too much."

The building, two stories in some places, is made of wood. About 5,000 pieces of timber were used, and the design retains the natural feel of the construction material by leaving posts and beams exposed.

The 143 students of the school resumed their studies in the new classrooms on Jan. 10.

Daruma dolls

January 9, 2017

VOX POPULI: Futaba daruma a symbol of hope, nostalgia for Fukushima

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201701090024.html>



Many people visited a daruma fair to buy Futaba darumas in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, on Jan. 7.
(Kazumasa Sugimura)

Daruma dolls, traditional round-shaped representations of the Indian priest Bodhidharma used as charms for the fulfillment of special wishes, are typically painted red, the color of his religious vestment, and have black eyebrows and a wispy beard painted on a white face.

But Futaba daruma, produced in Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture, feature blue-rimmed faces. The blue represents the Pacific Ocean, which stretches to the east of the town.

On the New Year's Day, many of the townsfolk would go to the seaside to watch the first sunrise of the year turning the vast expanse of water into a sea of shiny gold.

But the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, which generated massive tsunami and the catastrophic accident at the nuclear power plant partly located in the town, drastically changed the fate of Futaba. All of the residents were evacuated. Even now, 6,000 or so townsfolk live in 38 prefectures across the nation.

When I asked evacuees what they missed about life in the town before the nuclear disaster, they cited tea they would drink together with other members of the community after farm work, the local Bon Festival dance and local "kagura," or sacred Shinto music and dancing. They also talked nostalgically about the rice and vegetable fields which they took great care of, the croaking of frogs, flying fireflies and the sweet taste of freshly picked tomatoes.

What was lost is the richness of life that cannot be bought.

Kaori Araki, who has just celebrated reaching adulthood, cited the smell of the sea. "But what I miss most is my relationships with people," she added.

After leaving Futaba, Araki lived in Tokyo and Fukui, Saitama and Kanagawa prefectures before settling down in the city of Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture. Her current residence is her seventh since she left an evacuation center.

On that day in March 2011, Araki, then a second-year junior high school student, escaped the tsunami with a friend. At a Coming-of-Age ceremony on Jan. 3, she met the friend, who also ended up living in a remote community, for the first time in about six years.

The government plans to ensure that some areas in Futaba will be inhabitable in five years. The municipal government has estimated that the town's population a decade from now will be between 2,000 and 3,000.

In a survey of heads of families from Futaba conducted last fall, however, only 13 percent of the respondents said they wanted to return to the town.

A daruma fair to sell Futaba daruma started in front of temporary housing in Iwaki on Jan. 7.

The fair has been organized by volunteers since 2012 to keep this local New Year tradition alive. On Jan. 8, special buses brought people to the event from various locations both inside and outside the prefecture. There must have been many emotional reunions at the fair.

There were some green-colored daruma dolls sold at the fair as well. Green is the color of the school emblem of Futaba High School, which is to be closed at the end of March.

I hope that the daruma sold at the fair will help the purchasers fulfill their respective wishes.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Jan. 8

Vox Populi, Vox Dei is a popular daily column that takes up a wide range of topics, including culture, arts and social trends and developments. Written by veteran Asahi Shimbun writers, the column provides useful perspectives on and insights into contemporary Japan and its culture.

Crowdfunding for Hirono a success

January 11, 2017

Crowdfunding for Fukushima hospital with no full-time doctors a huge hit

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170111/p2a/00m/0na/008000c>



NEW	福島県広野町長 遠藤智
寄付総額	3,052,000円
目標金額	2,500,000円
寄付者数	198人
残り日数	49日
122%	
このプロジェクトに寄付する (※ログインが必要です)	

The crowdfunding website designed to raise funds for Takano Hospital in the town of Hirono in Fukushima Prefecture is seen here. (Mainichi)

The crowdfunding website designed to raise funds for Takano Hospital in the town of Hirono in Fukushima Prefecture is seen here. (Mainichi)

HIRONO, Fukushima -- An online crowdfunding campaign for a hospital here that was left with no full-time doctors after the death of its hospital director has reached its target of 2.5 million yen, just one day after its launch.

The campaign was set up for Takano Hospital, which is situated in the town of Hirono in Fukushima Prefecture, following the death in a house fire of hospital director Hideo Takano, 81, on Dec. 30, 2016. Dr. Takano was particularly noted for his bravery following the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant meltdowns in March 2011, as he chose not to flee, and continued to treat patients.

The online crowdfunding was initiated on Jan. 9, with the minimum donation amount set at 3,000 yen. By 7 p.m. on Jan. 10, approximately 3.05 million yen had been donated by 198 people across Japan. Tax deductions for these donations can be handled under the "hometown tax" system, and donors will receive a thank you letter from the mayor of Hirono, Satoshi Endo.

Money received from the crowdfunding will go toward covering the accommodation and transport costs of volunteer doctors who will visit Takano Hospital -- at which there are approximately 100 inpatients -- and help treat patients there. The campaign will continue until Feb. 28, and the donated amount that exceeds the 2.5 million yen target will be put toward reinforcing the medical care system in Hirono.

After seeing the swift and positive response from donors across Japan, Endo stated, "This level of generosity, from so many people across Japan, has been higher than expected. This will help us maintain local medical care in this disaster-affected region."

For anyone who would like to donate to this cause, the crowdfunding website is as follows:

<https://readyfor.jp/projects/hirono-med>

"Bullied for simply being an evacuee"

January 12, 2017 (Mainichi Japan)

Mother of bullied Fukushima evacuee reveals details of abuse to court

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170112/p2a/00m/0na/005000c>

The mother of a student who evacuated from Fukushima Prefecture to Tokyo in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster disclosed to the Tokyo District Court on Jan. 11 that the student had been bullied from elementary school and was told "you'll probably die from leukemia soon."

- **【Related】** Schoolteacher calls Fukushima evacuee pupil 'germ'

The mother was testifying as part of a damages lawsuit filed against Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) and the central government by about 50 plaintiffs including victims who voluntarily relocated to Tokyo after the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster.

"My child was bullied for simply being an evacuee, and not being able to publicly say we are evacuees has caused psychological trauma," the mother said.

The mother testified that directly after transferring to a public elementary school in Chiyoda Ward following the disaster, her child was bullied by a male classmate who said, "You came from Fukushima so

you'll probably die from leukemia soon." She said that the teacher, while joking, also added, "You will probably die by the time you're in middle school." She also asserted that a classmate pushed her child down the stairs after saying, "You're going to die anyway, so what's the difference?"

After moving on to junior high school, the student was reportedly forced by classmates to pay for around 10,000 yen worth of sweets and snacks. This bullying case is currently being investigated by a Chiyoda Ward Board of Education third-party committee.

Radioactive contamination of fish "under limit" in 2016

January 12, 2017

Radioactive substance in Fukushima fish under gov't limit in 2016

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170112/p2g/00m/0dm/038000c>

January 12, 2017 (Mainichi Japan)

FUKUSHIMA, Japan (Kyodo) -- Levels of radioactive cesium in all fish and seafood sampled in the coastal waters of Fukushima Prefecture last year did not exceed the central government's safety limit for the first time since the 2011 nuclear crisis, a local fishery laboratory said Wednesday.

The finding that radioactive cesium readings were below the regulatory maximum of 100 becquerels per kilogram was welcomed by the local government and fishermen, who are seeking to allay public concerns about contamination following the crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant triggered by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

According to the prefectural fishery laboratory, 95 percent of the 8,502 samples collected in 2016 showed radioactive cesium at levels that were hardly detectable, while readings for another 422 samples were below the limit.

"We were able to present data that fish and seafood in Fukushima are safe," said an official of the laboratory, which is hoping to expand the area and scope of sampling.

The prefectural government has been measuring concentrations of radioactive cesium in fish and seafood since April 2011, with sampling also undertaken in waters within a 20 kilometer radius of the nuclear plant.

The last time radioactive cesium readings surpassed the government limit was in March 2015.

The proportion of fish samples surpassing the limit has decreased every year since 2011, when the figure stood at 39.8 percent, according to laboratory data.

The figure stood at 16.5 percent in 2012, 3.7 percent in 2013, 0.9 percent in 2014 and 0.05 percent in 2015.

To fight rumors about Fukushima produce...

January 15, 2017

Fukushima to play direct role in pitching its produce in Tokyo-area supermarkets

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/01/15/national/fukushima-play-direct-role-pitching-produce-tokyo-area-supermarkets/>

Fukushima Minpo

To fight harmful rumors about Fukushima farm produce and to revive sales, the prefectural government plans to set up permanent sales spaces for susceptible products in major supermarkets in the Tokyo metropolitan area this summer.

The prefectural government has been trying to improve sales by emphasizing the results of radiation tests proving the products are safe. But supermarkets are still reluctant to sell Fukushima produce even six years after the triple core meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The prefectural government will now focus on establishing sales channels and making sure Fukushima-made produce is treated the same way as produce from other prefectures. It will provide funds to hire sales staff to promote the products and to offer perks to those who buy them.

To recover the sales channels lost after the 2011 meltdowns, prefectural officials have judged it necessary to directly support distribution in addition to publicizing the radiation tests to prove Fukushima produce is safe.

“We will take drastic measures to boost distribution of prefecture-made food products to recover and explore sales channels,” said Fukushima Gov. Masao Uchibori at his first news conference of the year on Jan. 4.

The prefecture plans to start the project in about 10 supermarkets in the Tokyo area before expanding to other stores after gauging public response. Fruit, vegetables, rice and meat produced in Fukushima will be sold at those locations and promoted by staff offering free samples. Prefectural officials may also try to generate interest by offering Fukushima products for free via lotteries.

The prefectural government plans to reach out to supermarket chains for proposals on how they would set up these dedicated promotional spaces. It believes retailers can benefit from the project because they can expect an increase in customers and sales by selling the produce with incentives attached.

Fukushima plans to invest part of the ¥4.7 billion in rumor-squelching funds allocated in the central government’s fiscal 2017 draft budget on projects aimed at improving its image.

“We will ask for the acceptance and cooperation of supermarkets so that sales sections and channels for Fukushima-made products lost after the Great East Japan Earthquake can be regained,” said an official of the Farm Produce Distribution Division.

This section, appearing every third Monday, focuses on topics and issues covered by the Fukushima Minpo, the largest newspaper in Fukushima Prefecture. The original article was published on Jan. 5.

The mothers of Fukushima (1)

An article in German by IPPNW

<https://www.ippnw.de/atomenergie/gesundheit/artikel/de/unabhaengige-untersuchung-und-beratu.html>

aus dem ATOM-Energie-Newsletter Januar 2017

Die Mütter von Fukushima

Unabhängige Untersuchung und Beratung für Betroffene des Super-GAU von Fukushima

09.01.2017

In Japan versuchen die Behörden weiterhin, die Bevölkerung bezüglich der Risiken der Atomenergie zu beruhigen. Ein enormer PR-Aufwand wird betrieben, um die Atomenergie in einem guten Licht darzustellen zu lassen und gegenläufige Nachrichten, kritische wissenschaftliche Ergebnisse und unangenehme Fakten zu unterdrücken. Unabhängige Strahlenmessstellen sind für die japanische Atomlobby daher ein besonderer Dorn im Auge – besonders wenn diese von Müttern betrieben werden, die die Gesundheit und die Zukunft ihrer Kindern als Motivation für ihre subversive Arbeit anführen.

In der Stadt Iwaki, nur etwa 50 km vom havarierten AKW entfernt, führt das gemeinnützige “Mothers’ Radiation Lab Fukushima” seit 5 Jahren unabhängige wissenschaftliche Strahlenmessungen durch. Der japanische Name (Iwaki Radiation Measuring Center Tarachine) spielt auf die “sorgsame Mutter” Tarachine in der japanischen Tradition an. Das Labor wurde von besorgten Müttern gegründet, die sich auf Demonstrationen gegen Atomenergie kennen gelernt hatten. Ihnen wurde bewusst, dass sie mit Demonstrationen alleine wenig bewirken konnten. Sie wollten etwas bewegen und das Schicksal ihrer Familien und ihrer Heimat nicht länger den Behörden in Tokyo überlassen, sondern in die eigene Hand nehmen. Daher fassten sie den Beschluss, eine unabhängiges Strahlenmess-Labor zu gründen und taten sich dafür mit Wissenschaftlern und Spezialisten zusammen. Sie sammelten Spenden, kauften die nötige Ausrüstung, bildeten sich fort und gründeten 2011 das Mother's Radiation Lab Fukushima.

Heute hat das Labor 12 MitarbeiterInnen und mehr Aufträge als es bearbeiten kann. Seit dem mehrfachen Super-GAU von Fukushima sind in Japan mehr als 100 bürgerbetriebene Labore entstanden, aber das Labor der Mütter in Iwaki ist das einzige, das über die nötige Gerätschaft zur Testung von Betastrahlern verfügt. Das ist wichtig, um in Nahrungsproben, wie z.B. von wilden Pilzen oder Obst radioaktive Stoffe wie Cäsium-134, Cäsium-137, Strontium-90 und Tritium zu detektieren. Das Labor veröffentlicht seine Daten online und rät der Bevölkerung dazu, Orte und Lebensmittel mit hoher nachgewiesener Strahlenbelastung zu meiden. Diese fundierten Daten und Warnungen sind für viele Familien im Alltag sehr wichtig und ergänzen die dürftigen Informationen der Präfektur und der Zentralregierung. Diesen scheint vor allem an einer baldmöglichen Wiederbelebung der regionalen Landwirtschaft gelegen zu sein, so dass unangenehme Erkenntnisse über anhaltende Strahlenbelastungen in Fukushima mit dem Argument verdrängt werden, man müsse nun optimistisch in die Zukunft blicken.

Die Mütter wissen, dass viele Familien an der einfachen aber lebenswichtigen Frage verzweifeln: was können wir noch sicher essen? Die Kluft zwischen denen, die unbeschwert die eigene Ernte verzehren und denen, die nur getestete und für sicher befundene Nahrung für ihre Familie zulassen, ist groß und verläuft zum Teil zwischen Ehepartnern oder Generationen, wenn beispielsweise ältere Menschen wie gewohnt Obst und Gemüse für den Eigenbedarf anbauen und ihre Kinder die Ernte aber für sich und ihre Familien

aus Sorge um radioaktive Belastung ablehnen. Hier bieten die Mütter mit ihrem unabhängigen Labor eine konkrete Lösung für potentiell verheerende Familienkonflikte. Die MitarbeiterInnen des Labors testen alles, was ihnen gebracht wird – von Reis über Laub bis hin zum Inhalt von Staubsaugerbeuteln.

Die Regierung testet Stichproben auf Großmärkten und im Handel, bietet aber keine Messungen von selbst angebautem Obst oder Gemüse an. Auch führte die Regierung groß angelegte Dekontaminationsprojekte in den Städten und Dörfern der kontaminierten Gebiete durch und stellte sicher, dass in Wohngebieten die Grenzwerte nicht überschritten werden. Mittlerweile sind diese Messungen jedoch teilweise schon Jahre her und die Flächen durch Pollenflug, Wind, Regen, Schnee und zum Teil auch Überschwemmungen bereits mehrfach rekontaminiert. Regelmäßige Messungen von Bodenproben oder Hausstaub werden von den Bewohnern der kontaminierten Gebiete dringend benötigt, von den Behörden jedoch nicht angeboten. In kommerziellen Laboren kosten solche Analysen rund 200.000-250.000 Yen (1.600-2.000 Euro). Im Mothers' Radiation Lab Fukushima kosten die selben Untersuchungen nur rund 3.000 Yen (25 Euro), so dass sich auch Privatleute eine Messung ihrer Ernte, ihrer Bodenproben, ihres Herbstlaubs oder ihres Hausstaubs leisten können.

Die Mütter bilden sich selber ständig fort und professionalisieren ihre Arbeit. Nun da sich das Labor mittlerweile etabliert hat, haben die Mütter vor, bis 2017 Japans erste von Bürgern betriebene Klinik zu gründen. Hier sollen die Betroffenen der Atomkatastrophe von Fukushima die Möglichkeit haben, Blutuntersuchungen, augenärztliche Untersuchungen auf Katarakte, Ultraschalluntersuchungen der Schilddrüse und Ganzkörper-Strahlenmessungen durchführen zu lassen. Einige dieser Angebote werden bereits jetzt unregelmäßig von MitarbeiterInnen des Bürger-Labors und Spezialisten angeboten, die aus ganz Japan nach Iwaki reisen um die dortige Bevölkerung zu unterstützen.

Während die Schilddrüsen von Kindern in der Präfektur Fukushima alle zwei Jahre von der Fukushima Medical University untersucht werden, gibt es in der Bevölkerung wachsende Kritik und Zweifel an den Ergebnissen dieser Tests. Die Unterlagen und Daten werden den Familien nicht ausgehändigt, die Ultraschalltermine sind nur sehr kurz und dürfen nur alle zwei Jahre durchgeführt werden und obendrein hat die Studienleitung wiederholt angegeben, die Untersuchungen mit dem Ziel durchzuführen, die Bevölkerung zu beruhigen. Daher sind die unabhängigen Untersuchungen des Mothers' Radiation Lab Fukushima für besorgte Familien so wichtig. Die Mütter planen zudem die Einführung umfassender Beratungsangebote und psychologische Unterstützung. Laut Angaben einer Umfrage der Chukyo Universität von 2014 haben 50% aller Mütter in Fukushima Sorge um die Gesundheit ihrer Kinder. Der psychische Stress des Lebens in einer kontaminierten Umwelt macht sich bei den Müttern, aber auch bei den Kindern bemerkbar.

Von Dr. Alex Rosen

Mehr Informationen

über das Mothers' Radiation Lab Fukushima und Informationen, wie man die Einrichtung am besten unterstützen kann, findet man auf den folgenden Webseiten:

- <https://www.facebook.com/Mothers-Radiation-Lab-Fukushima-686021531546687/>
- <http://www.iwakisokuteishitu.com/english/index.html>
- <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35784923>

The mothers of Fukushima (2)



In Japan the authorities continue to do their utmost to reassure the people about the risks of nuclear energy. Huge communication efforts are made to put nukes in a good light and play down new developments, critical scientific findings and unpleasant facts. People who have decided to measure radioactive contamination themselves are therefore seen as particularly obnoxious by the Japanese nuclear lobby. Even more so when this subversive initiative is taken by mothers reduced to it because their children's health and future is at stake.

For more information on the Fukushima mothers radiation lab, see :

<http://www.iwakisokuteishitu.com/english/index.html>

video : <https://youtu.be/dwq8bEZnJhU?t=51>

see also:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35784923>

Five years ago an earthquake off the coast of Japan triggered a tsunami and a series of meltdowns at the Fukushima nuclear plant. Kaori Suzuki's home is nearby - determined to stay, but worried about her children's health, she and some other mothers set up a laboratory to measure radiation.

A woman in a white lab coat puts some yellow organic material on a slide, while grey liquid bubbles in vials behind her. Other women, one of them heavily pregnant, discuss some data on a computer screen. A courier delivers a small parcel which is opened and its contents catalogued.

But this is no ordinary laboratory. None of these women trained as scientists. One used to be a beautician, another was a hairdresser, yet another used to work in an office. Together they set up a non-profit organisation - Tarachine - 50km (30 miles) down the coast from the Fukushima nuclear plant, to measure radiation in the city of Iwaki.

Kaori Suzuki, the lab's director, shows me a list of results. "This is the level of strontium 90 in Niboshi, dried small sardines, from the prefecture of Chiba," she says.

"What about this food?" I ask, pointing out a high number.

"Mushrooms have higher levels [of radiation]. The government has forbidden people from eating wild mushrooms, but many people don't care, they take them and eat," she says.

The lab mainly measures the radioactive isotopes caesium 134 and 137, and collects data on gamma radiation. Strontium 90 and tritium were only added to the list in April last year. "Since they emit only beta rays we weren't able to detect them until recently. Specific tools were necessary and we couldn't afford them," says Suzuki. Thanks to a generous donation, they now have the right equipment. Tarachine publishes its findings online every month, and advises people to avoid foods with high readings as well as the places they were grown.

★Gamma-ray			(Bq/Kg raw:Weight of raw sample Bq/Kg dry:Weight of dried sample)					
Samples	Sampling Point	Sampling Month	Measurement Result	Uncertainty	Total Amount of Caesium	Minimum Limit of Detection		
Rice	Aizu	Oct-15	Cs137	— <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	± — <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	Under Minimum Limit of Detection	Cs137	2.5 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>
			Cs134	— <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	± — <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>		Cs134	2.3 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>
Rice	Ishikawa Ishikawa	Oct-15	Cs137	— <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	± — <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	Under Minimum Limit of Detection	Cs137	2.2 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>
			Cs134	— <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	± — <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>		Cs134	2.1 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>
Brown rice	Sakai Osaka	Oct-15	Cs137	— <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	± — <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	Under Minimum Limit of Detection	Cs137	1.1 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>
			Cs134	— <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	± — <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>		Cs134	1.0 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>
Yuzu (citrus fruits)	Hobara Date	Jan-16	Cs137	8.8 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	± 2.5 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	12.0	Cs137	2.4 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>
			Cs134	3.2 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	± 1.6 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>		Cs134	2.3 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>
Lemon	Ena Iwaki	Jan-16	Cs137	6.5 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	± 2.4 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	6.5	Cs137	4.7 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>
			Cs134	— <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	± — <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>		Cs134	— <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>
Kawano-natsudaidai orange (without peel)	Yunabaya Jyoban Iwaki	Jan-16	Cs137	— <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	± — <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	Under Minimum Limit of Detection	Cs137	1.2 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>
			Cs134	— <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	± — <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>		Cs134	1.1 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>
Apple (without peel)	Fukushima	Dec-15	Cs137	— <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	± — <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	Under Minimum Limit of Detection	Cs137	2.7 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>
			Cs134	— <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	± — <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>		Cs134	2.5 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>
Butterbur sprout	Kubo Kashima Iwaki	Jan-16	Cs137	— <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	± — <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	Under Minimum Limit of Detection	Cs137	2.3 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>
			Cs134	— <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	± — <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>		Cs134	2.6 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>
Dried persimmon	Touno Iwaki	Oct-15	Cs137	3.2 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	± 1.5 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	3.2	Cs137	2.1 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>
			Cs134	— <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	± — <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>		Cs134	1.7 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>
Pollution raw wood shiitake mushrooms	Nagasaki Iwaki	Jan-16	Cs137	198 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	± 40.0 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	253	Cs137	8.1 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>
			Cs134	54.9 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	± 12.8 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>		Cs134	7.4 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>
Thinly sliced and dried strips of radish	Tabito Iwaki	unknown	Cs137	3.4 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	± 1.9 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	3.4	Cs137	2.8 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>
			Cs134	— <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	± — <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>		Cs134	2.5 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>
Thinly sliced and dried strips of radish	Iwaki	unknown	Cs137	4.2 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	± 2.7 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	4.2	Cs137	3.9 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>
			Cs134	— <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>	± — <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>		Cs134	3.6 <small>Bq/Kg raw</small>

Image Tarachine

Five years ago, Suzuki knew nothing about radiation. She spent her time looking after her two children and teaching yoga. The earthquake on 11 March 2011 changed everything.

"I've never experienced so much shaking before and I was very scared. Right from the moment it started I had a feeling that something might have happened to the nuclear plant," she says. "The first thing I did was to fill up my car with petrol. I vividly remember that moment."

The authorities evacuated the area around the nuclear plant - everyone within a 20km (12-mile) radius was told to leave, and those who lived up to 30km (18 miles) away were instructed to stay indoors.

Despite living outside the exclusion zone, Suzuki and her family fled and drove south. The roads were congested with cars and petrol stations ran dry.

"We didn't come back home until the middle of April and even then we wondered if it was safe to stay," says Suzuki. "But my husband has his own business with 70 employees, so we felt we couldn't leave."

Although radiation levels in Iwaki were officially quite low, the "invisible enemy" was all people could talk about. Conversations with friends changed abruptly from being about children, food and fashion, to one topic only: radiation. "You can't see, smell or feel it, so it is something people are afraid of," says Suzuki.

Above all, people didn't know what was safe to eat.

"It was a matter of life and death," she says.

Fukushima is farming country and many people grow their own vegetables. "People here love to eat home-grown food and there's a strong sense of community with people offering food to their friends and

neighbours," says Suzuki. This caused a lot of anxiety. "A difficult situation would arise where grandparents would be growing food, but younger mothers would be worried about giving it to their children."

Suzuki formed the group "Iwaki Action Mama" together with other mothers in the area. At first they organised demonstrations against nuclear power, but then they decided on a new tactic - they would learn how to measure radiation themselves.

They saved and collected \$600 (£420) to buy their first Geiger counter online, but when it arrived the instructions were written in English, which none of them understood. But they persevered and with the help of experts and university professors, organised training workshops. Soon they knew all about becquerels, a unit used to measure radiation, and sieverts, a measure of radiation dose. They would meet at restaurants and cafes to compare readings.

Becquerels and Sieverts

- A becquerel (Bq), named after French physicist Henri Becquerel, is a measure of radioactivity
- A quantity of radioactive material has an activity of 1Bq if one nucleus decays per second - and 1kBq if 1,000 nuclei decay per second
- A sievert (Sv) is a measure of radiation absorbed by a person, named after Swedish medical physicist Rolf Sievert

In November 2011 the women decided to get serious and set up a laboratory. They raised money and managed to buy their first instrument designed specifically to measure food contamination - it cost 3 million yen (£18,500, or \$26,400).

They named the laboratory Tarachine, which means mothers - in particular, "beautiful mothers that protect their families" according to Suzuki.

"We felt as though we were on the front line of a battlefield," Suzuki says. "When you're at war you do what you have to do, and measuring was the thing we felt we had to do."

Today Tarachine has 12 employees, and more work than it can handle. People bring in food, earth, grass and leaves from their backyards for testing. The results are published for everyone to see. At first the lab was able to provide results after three or four days, but its service has become so popular it can hardly keep up. "We have so many requests for strontium 90 now that it can take three months," says Prof Hikaru Amano, the lab's technical manager.

Amano confesses he was surprised that a group of amateurs could learn to do this job so accurately, but says it is important work.

People began to mistrust the nuclear contamination data provided by the government and by the Tokyo Electric Power Company (Tepco), which manages the nuclear plant, he says.

About 100 so-called "citizen laboratories" have since sprung up, but Tarachine is unusual because it monitors both gamma and beta rays - most can only measure gamma rays - and because it tests whatever people want, whether it's a home-grown carrot or the dust from their vacuum-cleaner.

The government does take regular readings from fixed points in Fukushima prefecture. It also check harvests and foods destined for the market - for example, all Fukushima-grown rice is required to undergo radiation checks before shipping.

But "if you want to know the level of strontium and tritium in your garden, the government won't do this measurement," says Suzuki. "If you decide to measure it yourself, you'll need 200,000-250,000 yen (£1,535, or \$2,200) for the tests, and ordinary people can't afford to pay these costs. We have to keep doing this job so that people can have the measurements they want." Tarachine only charges a small fee - less than 3,000 yen (£18, or \$27).

Image copyright Emanuele Satolli Image caption Mother of two Kaori Suzuki now spends much of her time at the laboratory

Tarachine also provides training and equipment to anyone who wants to do their own measurements.

"Some of the mothers measure soil samples in their schools. It's fantastic, they really have become quite skilled at doing this," says Suzuki.

And the group keeps an eye on children's health. It runs a small clinic where doctors from all over Japan periodically come to provide free thyroid cancer check-ups for local children. Since screening began, 166 children in Fukushima prefecture have been diagnosed with - or are suspected of having - thyroid cancer. This is a far higher rate than in the rest of the country, although some experts say that's due to over-diagnosis.

And for parents who want to give their children a break from the local environment, Tarachine even organises summer trips to the south of the country.

Suzuki's own life has changed dramatically since 2011. "I was just a simple mother, enjoying her life. But ever since I started this, I've been spending most of my time here, from morning to night," she says. "I must admit, sometimes I think it would be really nice to have a break, but what we are doing is too important. We're providing a vital service.

"If you want to have peace of mind after an accident like the Fukushima one, then I believe you need to do what we're doing."

Kaori Suzuki spoke to *Outlook on the BBC World Service*

What is the easiest way of disposing of nuclear waste?

January 17, 2017

Designation of radioactive waste lifted

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20170117_13/

Japan's environment ministry has lifted the radioactive designation it applied to a batch of waste after the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident.

About 200 kilograms of waste stored at a private facility in Yamagata Prefecture can now be disposed of as general waste.

People familiar with the matter say the radioactivity level of the waste was confirmed to be lower than the government-set level of 8,000 becquerels per kilogram.

The ministry said it sent a letter, dated January 13th, to notify the facility of its decision to lift the designation.

It is the first time the ministry has lifted the designation for waste kept by a private company in connection with the nuclear accident.

Last July, the ministry lifted the designation of radioactive waste stored in the city of Chiba, just outside Tokyo. It was the first case among municipalities storing radioactive waste from the Fukushima accident's fallout.

Ministry officials say as of September 30th last year, there was about 179,000 tons of waste designated as radioactive across the country.

Bullying (follow-up)

January 24, 2017

Parents of bullied Fukushima evacuee say school overlooked daughter's SOS call

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170124/p2a/00m/0na/006000c>

NIIGATA -- The parents of a student who was bullied after evacuating from Fukushima Prefecture to Niigata Prefecture in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster have expressed distrust toward their daughter's school in an interview with the Mainichi Shimbun.

- **【Related】** Another Fukushima evacuee bullied at school: Niigata Pref. education board

The first-year junior high school student was verbally abused with the word for "germ" attached to the end of her name after her evacuation to northern Niigata Prefecture in 2012. Her parents said that her daughter had called attention to her plight, writing "the bullying is continuing," but that her school overlooked it.

"It was a clear SOS call from our daughter. Failing to notice the key part means the teacher is not qualified," one of the parents said.

The girl evacuated to the prefecture with her family in the summer of 2012, the year after the outbreak of the nuclear disaster at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. She was bullied at the elementary school she attended, and in a passage she wrote in class at her junior high school in July last year she gave details of the abuse. She said that the badmouthing was "really tough," and wrote that even after she had started attending junior high "the bullying is still continuing."

According to the girl's parents, the school told them that her message was overlooked because "the Japanese teacher in charge only read it partway through." However, during a news conference by the local education board, educators altered the explanation, saying, "The teacher read the full text afterward, but doesn't recall whether or not they were aware of the bullying."

The parents criticized educators for "trying to hide what makes them look bad."

In mid-December last year, the school provided guidance to 11 perpetrators of the bullying. According to the parents, one of the students saw the teacher watching a video website while they were being made to write apologies, and said, "It made me think that our bullying was just something (light) like that."

During a probe by the school, some of the perpetrators were quoted as saying that they didn't know that the victim was an evacuee. The school subsequently concluded that the bullying was not related to the student's evacuation. The victim's parents, however, argued that everyone would have known she was an evacuee.

Their daughter hasn't been to school once from January, saying "school is scary." They are calling for officials to rectify the situation.

"We want the school to tell the truth, and to create an environment in which our daughter can attend school with peace of mind."

First raw milk since 3/11 from previous evacuation zone

January 24, 2017

First raw milk since 3/11 ships out from former evacuation zone

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201701240041.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The first shipment of raw milk has been made from an area once declared an evacuation zone after the 2011 accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, paving the way for public consumption. Eighteen cows were milked starting at about 8 a.m. on Jan. 24 at Hiruta dairy farm in **Naraha, Fukushima Prefecture**.

About 400 liters of unpasteurized milk were collected and shipped in a tanker truck to a processing plant. The JA Zen-Noh Fukushima, part of the National Federation of Agricultural Cooperative Associations, will conduct a radiation test on the milk. If the product passes, it will be mixed with other raw milk from Fukushima before being distributed for consumption.

"Today marks the starting line," said Hiroaki Hiruta, 48, who operates the farm. "We want to continue producing safe and delicious milk."

After the Fukushima nuclear accident, residents in 11 cities, towns and villages were ordered to evacuate due to high radiation levels. Naraha's order was lifted in September 2015.

Immediately after the March 2011 nuclear accident, the shipment of raw milk from all of Fukushima Prefecture was prohibited, but the ban was lifted for all but the 11 evacuated municipalities by October 2011.

Farm in ex-evacuation area near Fukushima nuke plant ships milk again

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170124/p2g/00m/0dm/080000c>

January 24, 2017 (Mainichi Japan)

FUKUSHIMA, Japan (Kyodo) -- A dairy farm near the disaster-struck Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in northeastern Japan began shipping raw milk again on Tuesday.

It was the first milk shipped for processing and public sale from an area previously designated for evacuation following the March 2011 nuclear disaster at the seaside plant in Fukushima Prefecture, according to the prefectural government.

Milk produced at the farm in the Naraha district had been checked for radioactive cesium every week from last May to December, with **no reading ever surpassing the government-set limit of 50 becquerels per kilogram. In fact, the readings were below the testing equipment detection limit.**

Around 400 kg of raw milk from 18 cows was shipped Tuesday.

"We were able to start operating this farm again with the support of so many people," said farm head Hiroaki Hiruta, 48. "I want to pay a debt of gratitude by making good milk."

Following the disaster, in which a massive amount of radioactive material was spewed into the air and sea, the central government banned milk shipments from the area in March 2011. Restrictions were lifted last December for the area where Hiruta's farm is located.

Similar restrictions are still in place for eight other districts, including the towns of Okuma and Futaba where the nuclear power station is located.

3/11 at Tokyo exhibit

January 25, 2017

Catastrophic power of 3/11 disaster shown at Tokyo exhibit

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201701250008.html>

By EIICHI MIYASHIRO/ Senior Staff Writer



A hair salon clock stopped at 2:46 p.m., the time the Great East Japan Earthquake struck in 2011 (Eiichi Miyashiro)

A broken hair salon clock and bent street signs are among items on display in Tokyo that attest to the enormous power of the earthquake and tsunami that hit northeastern Japan in March 2011.

The special exhibition has been held in areas devastated by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. The current display at Meiji University Museum in Chiyoda Ward is the first outside the disaster zone.

"Everyday items had their shapes and significance transformed as they were struck by the disaster, turning them into historical records conveying the extraordinary nature of the event," said Mitsuru Takahashi, head curator at the Fukushima Museum in Fukushima, where the exhibition was held last year.

"We hope for people to listen to what these earthquake relics have to say so that the experience of Fukushima can be shared and passed onto the next generation," he said.

The exhibit is being organized by a committee consisting of museums in Fukushima Prefecture to preserve the heritage of the disaster.

The clock that was set up outside a hair salon shows the time when the magnitude-9.0 earthquake rocked the region. Also on display are distorted parts of a police car that was swept away by the tsunami while calling for people to evacuate.

Committee members have traveled across Fukushima Prefecture since 2014, collecting and preserving various items that tell a story of what happened almost six years ago. Among the collection are candles used in evacuation shelters and bundles of newspapers that were never delivered the morning after the disaster.

The committee started the project out of concerns that memories of the disaster would be lost if these items were discarded.

The exhibition will run through Feb. 5. Special events will be held on weekends, including a 3-D experience of disaster sites and a lecture about the relics.

"Not even at the starting line"

January 30, 2017

Fukushima governor rebuts minister's 3/11 recovery claim

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201701300051.html>

By NORIYOSHI OHTSUKI/ Senior Staff Writer

FUKUSHIMA--Using marathon analogies, opinions on the current state of Fukushima Prefecture almost six years after the 2011 nuclear accident were running far apart between a national minister and local officials at a conference here to discuss the recovery process.

"If this is a marathon, Fukushima's recovery is 30 kilometers into the race," said Reconstruction Minister Masahiro Imamura at the beginning of the conference on reconstruction of quake damage and rebuilding in the prefecture on Jan. 28. "Now, we have come to the crunch."

A disgruntled Fukushima Governor Masao Uchibori refuted Imamura's optimistic analogy when he was interviewed by reporters after the conference's close.

"Some regions in the designated evacuation zones are not even at the starting line," said Uchibori. "Even in the areas where the designation is already lifted, recovery has only just begun."

The evacuation order in most of the surrounding area of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant is scheduled to be lifted at the end of March, apart from some "difficult-to-return zones" where radiation readings remain high.

The affected municipal governments are concerned that the central government's understanding of areas affected by the 2011 disaster has been fading as the sixth anniversary approaches in March.

Aside from the opening, the conference, chaired by Imamura, was closed to the media.

According to one attendee, Imamura told conference delegates that he put "Fukushima first."

Aping the catchphrase style of U.S. President Donald Trump and Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike, Imamura apparently meant he prioritizes the recovery of the disaster-hit area of Fukushima Prefecture, but his choice of words failed to impress local officials.

The head of one municipal government said: "It is not a very good catchphrase to use here as it reminds us of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant."

"I would like him to be more sensitive about expressions he uses," another complained.

Ice cream knows no fear of radiation

January 29, 2017

Fukushima ice cream sales immune to fears of radiation

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201701290010.html>

By MANA NAGANO/ Staff Writer

KORIYAMA, Fukushima Prefecture--A dairy company here that has withstood fears and rumors about radiation has produced a hot-selling item in the middle of winter.

Within two weeks in November, the initial 6,000 cups of Rakuou Cafe au Lait Ice Cream, produced by Rakuounyugyou Co. in Koriyama, were nearly sold out.

The company, founded in 1975, shipped out an additional lot of around 18,000 cups in December, but this supply has also run short.

Rakuounyugyou shipped 25,000 more cups, mostly to outlets in Fukushima Prefecture, in mid-January, and plans to ship an additional 24,000 within this month.

"Perhaps our ice cream is being seen as more of a premium product," a sales official at the company said.

Rakuounyugyou's Rakuou Cafe au Lait, a mild-flavored lactic drink containing at least 50 percent raw milk from Fukushima Prefecture, has an entrenched fan base both in and outside the prefecture.

The company maintained its sales levels in the aftermath of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, while its competitors suffered losses due to radiation fears and rumors among the public.

Rakuounyugyou developed the ice cream product to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the release of Rakuou Cafe au Lait. The ice cream contains at least 10 percent Rakuou Cafe au Lait and at least 10 percent milk.

"We exercised trial and error because we absolutely didn't want to disappoint fans of our Cafe au Lait," the sales official said.

The ice cream was initially sold mainly at sightseeing facilities and expressway service areas in Fukushima Prefecture. Demand was high even though the company did little in the way of a sales campaign.

The spreading popularity of the product can be attributed to Twitter.

Tweets about the ice cream can sound like a hunt for a rare Pokemon on the "Pokemon Go" game app.

"Where could I get one?" one post said. "I got one!" said another.

It is not the first time the social networking service has helped the dairy company; tweets of encouragement spread in the aftermath of the nuclear disaster.

"Be what may, the Rakuou Cafe au Lait tastes so good," said one particularly popular tweet at that time.

Cafe au Lait is being shipped to a growing number of retailers, most of them in the greater Tokyo area. Sales of the product are up 10 percent from pre-disaster levels.

"Word of our ice cream has also been spread by our fans," the sales official said. "We are so grateful that we are reduced to tears."

Fukushima : "It is too soon to let go"

Video from NHK, January 28, 2017

Learning from Chernobyl children

<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/videos/20170126194429680/>

A Japanese woman has received a prestigious award for supporting children who suffered from what's considered the worst nuclear disaster in history.

She's using the recognition to send a message to people in her own country.

The Ukrainian embassy honored Mari Sasaki for the work her organization, the Chernobyl Children's Fund Japan, has done for the past 26 years.

"With our utmost love and respect, on behalf of the whole nation of Ukraine, President Petro Poroshenko gives the most prestigious decoration to you. I wish your honored activities continue."

"We've supported children suffering from diseases caused by the Chernobyl disaster for a long time. I feel you've recognized our efforts," Sasaki responds.

In 1986, a reactor in the former USSR exploded, sending huge amount of radioactive substances into the air and contaminating wide areas. It had severe repercussions on residents' health.

The Chernobyl Children's Fund started 5 years later when it was clear kids were still physically suffering. Sasaki joined in 1998, volunteering at hospices, and introducing Japanese culture to children undergoing operations.

The organization donated tons of relief supplies and equipment -- even an ambulance. It has supported almost 12,000 Ukrainian and Belarussian kids.

One of the main ways it has done that is by finding people in Japan to act as sponsors.

"I think we have a strong bond. My sponsor child can't use his hands properly, but he tries so hard to write. It makes me so happy," says one of the foster parents.

Sasaki visits Belarus and Ukraine every year to check in on the children.

One of them was Inna Polischuku. She underwent a thyroid operation at age 7. But it created complications. She later married and had a daughter, but died at the age of 24.

"They suffer from not just thyroid cancer, but brain cancer, liver cancer, or various diseases when they are still so young. The situation has continued for 31 years, and no one knows when it will end," explains Sasaki.

She says it shouldn't be an issue if their diseases aren't directly related to the accident. She says if there's even a slight possibility of a connection, they should be looked after.

After the Fukushima nuclear accident in 2011, the group decided to use their experience to offer support in Japan. They've been monitoring children's health and giving families information.

Sasaki feels most people in Japan are moving past concerns about the accident, but she warns it's too soon for that.

"People need to know that 3 decades after Chernobyl, the damage is still being felt. In Japan, we have to remember that we still don't know the full extent of the fallout even though it's already been 6 years. We need to keep watching the situation."

Sasaki says the victims of the disasters need to be continually cared for, and she hopes the medal will serve as a reminder that the work will never end.

Is "lower than the limit" safe enough?

February 3, 2017

All Fukushima seafood samples pass safety tests for radioactivity

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201702030003.html>

By KAZUMASA SUGIMURA/ Staff Writer

February 3, 2017 at 07:00 JST

IWAKI, Fukushima Prefecture--For the first time, radioactivity levels were lower than the government's safety limit in every seafood sample caught off Fukushima Prefecture for an entire year, officials said. The Fukushima Prefectural Fisheries Experimental Station said 8,502 fish and shellfish samples were tested in 2016, and all recorded radioactivity readings under the safety standard of 100 becquerels per kilogram.

Ninety-five percent of them tested below the detection limit of around 15 becquerels per kilogram.

It was also the first time more than 90 percent of samples were below the detection threshold since the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant started in March 2011, according to the officials.

People in the local fishing industry hope the numbers will help lead to a return to normal operations, although they say it is difficult to gauge the impact of harmful rumors about Fukushima seafood because prices depend on multiple factors, including quantity and quality.

"Test fishing is, after all, test fishing," said Yuji Kanari, a managing director with seafood wholesaler Iwaki Gyorui KK. "Turning that into full fishing operations like before (the disaster) will emerge as a major challenge this year.

"I hope that local consumption of locally produced goods that was disrupted by the nuclear disaster will soon be back."

The hauls from test fishing, which began in June 2012, have grown from year to year.

Preliminary figures show last year's catch at 2,072 tons, up 560 tons from 2015, but still only 7.9 percent of the annual catch of 26,050 tons averaged over the decade preceding the 2011 disaster.

Ninety-four species are eligible for this year's test fishing, which the Soma-Futaba fisheries cooperative association started on Jan. 10 and the Iwaki city fisheries cooperative association began on Jan. 12.

Reconstruction Agency in need of improvement

February 11, 2017

EDITORIAL: Agency handling 3/11 rebuilding needs to break out of its mold

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201702110028.html>

The Reconstruction Agency has spent the past five years overseeing the rebuilding of areas in the northeastern Tohoku region that were devastated by the earthquake and tsunami disaster in 2011. It has passed the halfway point in the time frame for its mission as the organization is set to be disbanded by March 2021.

In areas engulfed by the tsunami, significant progress has been made toward achieving infrastructure-related goals, such as the building of public housing and roads.

But **efforts to rebuild local communities and industries have met with less success.**

In areas around Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, reconstruction work is only now shifting into high gear as evacuations orders are being lifted one by one.

In seeking to fulfill its mission, the agency has so far placed priority on acting as a close partner of the affected areas and paying sympathetic attention to the voices of local governments and residents there. The challenge facing the agency now is whether it can move from that role and focus more on identifying and solving problems in areas that are hindering progress. The challenge will test the body's ability to play the leadership role in the reconstruction efforts.

The agency has stood out by devoting much energy into tasks that were not regarded as part of the government's domain prior to the disaster.

It has, for instance, promoted exchanges among people living in temporary housing and referred individuals wishing to be involved in the reconstruction of battered communities to local governments and other relevant organizations.

Since this is a field not familiar to the government, the agency has been cooperating actively with nonprofit organizations and businesses which have the necessary expertise.

But **the agency has failed to demonstrate to accurately assess the reality of disaster-hit areas and adjust its policy to the situation on the ground.**

In one typical case of mismatched policy, a huge tide embankment was built near an area where a housing reconstruction project had made little headway.

A program to provide state subsidies to support the rebuilding of plants and commercial facilities has been criticized by local communities for its inappropriate conditions with regard to employment and occupation. Critics say the conditions are out of tune with reality and make the program hard to use.

Most of the projects for rebuilding demolished areas and communities are overseen by other ministries and agencies. The Reconstruction Agency's role has been to act as coordinator in various projects.

But **many of the agency's employees were simply transferred from other ministries and agencies. It is hard not to suspect that their decisions and actions may be affected by their loyalty or the interests of the organizations from which they came.**

The Reconstruction Agency is regarded as having higher status than many other arms of the government. It has the power to issue recommendations to other ministries and agencies. But it has never used this power.

The head of the Reconstruction Agency is replaced almost annually, making it difficult for the body to enhance its presence.

The focus of the reconstruction work will shift to areas in Fukushima Prefecture around the stricken nuclear power plant.

Until now, the tasks related to compensation for victims of the nuclear calamity and decontamination of affected areas have been carried out by other ministries and agencies.

But the Reconstruction Agency should take the leadership role in efforts to regenerate local communities in these areas.

The 2011 disaster has sharply accelerated the aging and depopulation of affected local communities. But these problems are common to many areas around the nation.

The Reconstruction Agency's experiences can be very useful for future projects to revitalize local communities across Japan.

The agency needs to work in tandem with NPOs and businesses in carrying out its public duties.

We hope the body will expand the scope of this approach and set a model for government efforts to build a better future for the nation.

Bullying officially admitted

February 13, 2017

Yokohama school officials admit Fukushima boy who paid classmates was victim of bullying

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/02/13/national/yokohama-school-officials-admit-fukushima-boy-paid-classmates-victim-bullying/>

Kyodo

YOKOHAMA – The Yokohama Board of Education has admitted that a 13-year-old boy's payments to classmates were the result of bullying when he was attending a local elementary school after evacuating from Fukushima Prefecture to escape the 2011 nuclear disaster.

Yuko Okada, the board's chief, reversed her previous stance on the incident and apologized at a news conference Monday, following criticism of her earlier statement that she could not determine whether the payments were related to bullying.

The boy surrendered a total of around ¥1.5 million to classmates, according to his family.

According to a report compiled by a third-party panel in November, the student paid money to his classmates for leisure activities, such as playing arcade games, when he was in the fifth grade. They reportedly demanded the money based on the assumption that his family must have received government compensation related to the nuclear crisis.

The report said the boy presumably paid the money to avoid being bullied. It did not recognize the payments themselves as bullying but confirmed there were acts of bullying, such as being called a "germ" in reference to nuclear contamination.

On Jan. 20, Okada told a committee of the municipal assembly that the board of education was not able to determine that the money payments were the result of bullying, based on the school's dealings with the students involved.

Okada held the news conference after the student's lawyer on Monday submitted a letter by the boy to Yokohama Mayor Fumiko Hayashi requesting a meeting with her.

"Why does the Yokohama Board of Education see only part of (the incident) and not the whole picture?" the student wrote in his letter to the mayor. "Why did the school make the decision without listening to

what the victim's side said but with only listening to what the victimizers' side said? ... I would like to know why and I hope you will listen to my story."

The boy entered the elementary school in Yokohama as a second-grader in August 2011, but after being called a "germ" he began missing school in the third grade, according to the report.

The boy's parents told the school in May 2014 that their son was a victim of bullying and told the police in July that he was involved in money trouble with his classmates.

See also <http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201702140068.html>

Bullied boy from Fukushima gets belated apology from authorities

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

"Underpricing" of Fukushima produce

February 15, 2017

Agency to probe reasons behind underpricing of Fukushima items

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201702150001.html>

By NORIYOSHI OHTSUKI/ Senior Staff Writer

Prices of agricultural products and foodstuffs from Fukushima Prefecture declined after the nuclear plant accident in March 2011, and almost six years later, have yet to recover to pre-disaster levels.

Now the government is seeking to ascertain why these items are still being sold at lower prices, suspecting that wholesalers are deliberately underpricing products being shipped from the prefecture. The Reconstruction Agency will survey wholesalers' purchase prices of Fukushima-made food products, according to sources.

The agency believes crops and other items grown in the prefecture are being undersold because of the negative effects of groundless rumors stemming from the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The latest decision is aimed at preventing the spread of those rumors.

The agency's plan is expected to be included in a draft revision of the Law on Special Measures for the Reconstruction and Revitalization of Fukushima, to be submitted during the current Diet session.

Since the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, triggered the nuclear accident, Fukushima-made foodstuffs have been shipped only after their radioactivity levels are confirmed to be below safety standards.

The levels for those agricultural and other products typically fall below detectable levels, meaning most foodstuffs from Fukushima Prefecture are completely safe to eat.

Despite the fact, trading prices of rice and beef produced in the prefecture are still nearly 10 percent lower than national averages, according to the agency.

The agency suspects that the prices have not recovered to their pre-disaster levels not only because consumers tend to avoid Fukushima-made articles, but also because they are "purchased at unreasonably low rates" at the time of shipping.

When prices to wholesalers of food products grown in the prefecture are lower than pre-disaster rates, farmers can be compensated for the difference by Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

“Some wholesalers may knock down the price, misusing the compensation system,” said a source at the Reconstruction Agency.

To prevent the abuse of the compensation system, the special measures law will be amended to include a plan to conduct “a survey to make clear why they (Fukushima-made products) are suffering from sluggish sales.”

Based on the revised law, the agency will survey the prices farmers are selling their crops for to wholesalers, how much consumers are paying for the agricultural products and other trading prices of foodstuffs from Fukushima Prefecture.

After identifying the reason for the lower prices, the agency will offer instructions and advice to wholesalers and other related parties.

More discrimination and harassment

February 21, 2017

University teacher harassed Fukushima student

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20170221_80/

A university has disciplined a lecturer for making discriminatory remarks to a student from Fukushima Prefecture, citing the ongoing nuclear accident there.

In the October 2014 incident, a part-time English teacher at Kwansei Gakuin University in Hyogo Prefecture, western Japan, told the student she had been exposed to radiation.

The teacher is reported to have turned off the lights in class, saying he thought the student would glow in the dark.

The lecturer is a foreign national. He is accused of making such comments in both Japanese and English.

University officials say after the incident the student tended to be absent. She could not earn enough credits to pass and requested counseling at the university last year.

Officials say following an inquiry, the teacher explained that he meant it as a joke. He reportedly said he is deeply remorseful and wants to apologize to the student.

The university has cut the lecturer's pay for 3 months and decided not to renew his contract the next school year.

Vice President Shoichi Ito said his university extends its deepest apologies to the student and the people affected by the March 11th disaster.

He said the university will work to raise awareness among staff and prevent recurrences. Many students at Kwansei Gakuin University have expressed shock over the lecturer's discriminatory remarks against a student from Fukushima.

A male student said the nuclear accident should not be made into a joke because students who were victims of the disaster can't change that fact. He said he doesn't want to be taught by a person who says such things.

A female student said it's unbelievable a teacher would say something like that even as many students and faculty are involved in efforts to support evacuees from the disaster. She said she wants to tell the harassed student that not everyone is prejudiced.

Teacher rebuked for radiation jibe at student from Fukushima

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201702210043.html>

By HIDEMASA YOSHIKAWA/ Staff Writer

NISHINOMIYA, Hyogo Prefecture--A foreign English teacher has been disciplined by a university here after he poked fun at a student from Fukushima Prefecture, where the nuclear meltdown occurred after the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011.

Kwansei Gakuin University took the disciplinary action by docking the instructor's pay over the incident that occurred in 2014 but was not reported until April 2016.

The student in question took the matter up with university officials after a new harassment consultation center was established.

According to university officials, the woman from Fukushima Prefecture entered the university's education school in the spring of 2014.

In autumn that year, the student signed up for an English class of about 30 students taught by a non-Japanese male part-time instructor in his 40s.

The instructor asked the students where they were from. When the woman said Fukushima Prefecture, the instructor turned off the classroom lights and said he thought she would glow in the dark because she had been contaminated with radiation.

The woman was shocked by the statement, considering it discriminatory. She began skipping classes, but did not complain to university officials.

When the harassment consulting center was established, the woman visited it from late April 2016 on a number of occasions to discuss the issue. In late October, she submitted a formal harassment complaint against the instructor.

University officials questioned the instructor in November. He said he could not remember if he turned off the lights, but admitted to the comment, saying that it was meant in jest. He offered to apologize to the student.

The joke did not go over well, and the officials decided to cut his pay for three months, effective from Feb. 17, and plans not to renew his contract, which ends in March.

Shoichi Ito, a university vice president, issued a statement that said: "We extend our deepest apology to the student as well as to all those who were affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake. We will make efforts to prevent a recurrence by promoting greater awareness among our faculty."

Kwansei Gakuin University was established in 1889 by the American missionary Walter R. Lambuth, based on Christian principles.

Fukushima peaches make model recovery

February 19, 2017

Fukushima peach exports recover in Southeast Asia, sparking hope for other produce

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/02/19/national/fukushima-peach-exports-recover-southeast-asia-sparking-hope-produce/>

Fukushima Minpo

Fukushima peaches are making inroads into Southeast Asian markets in what prefectural officials see as a model case of recovery in its farm produce.

Fukushima grabbed the top share of Japanese peach exports to three Southeast Asian countries last year — 73.9 percent in Thailand, 76.8 percent in Malaysia and 55.9 percent in Indonesia.

In terms of volume, Fukushima exported a combined 30.6 tons of peaches to the three countries plus Singapore in 2016, surpassing the 23.9 tons logged in 2010 — the year before the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant shattered trust in its farm produce in March 2011.

Given the improved figures, the Fukushima Prefectural Government now believes the measures it took to combat harmful rumors are paying off. It hopes to revive sales channels for other produce by using the recovery of peach exports as a base.

The prefectural government announced the export data at the end of January based on the Finance Ministry's trade statistics for 2016 and other figures compiled by the Fukushima headquarters of the National Federation of Agricultural Cooperative Associations, or JA Zen-Noh.

Fukushima is the nation's No. 2 peach-growing prefecture after Yamanashi and has been dubbed a "fruit kingdom" for the wide variety grown, including cherries, grapes, pears and apples.

Its peach exports peaked at 70 tons in 2008, thanks mainly to Taiwan and Hong Kong, but import bans imposed from the Fukushima disaster saw the peach trade collapse to zero in 2011.

According to the prefecture's public relations office, Fukushima was quick to review its sales strategy and shift focus to Southeast Asia, where some countries eased import restrictions on its produce at an early stage.

A decision to promote the sweetness and freshness of Fukushima peaches was also a major factor in grabbing the hearts of consumers, the office said.

Despite the success in Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia, it may take time before other countries in the region follow suit.

In Singapore, for example, Fukushima peaches last year had a market share of only 12 percent among all peaches the city-state imported from Japan.

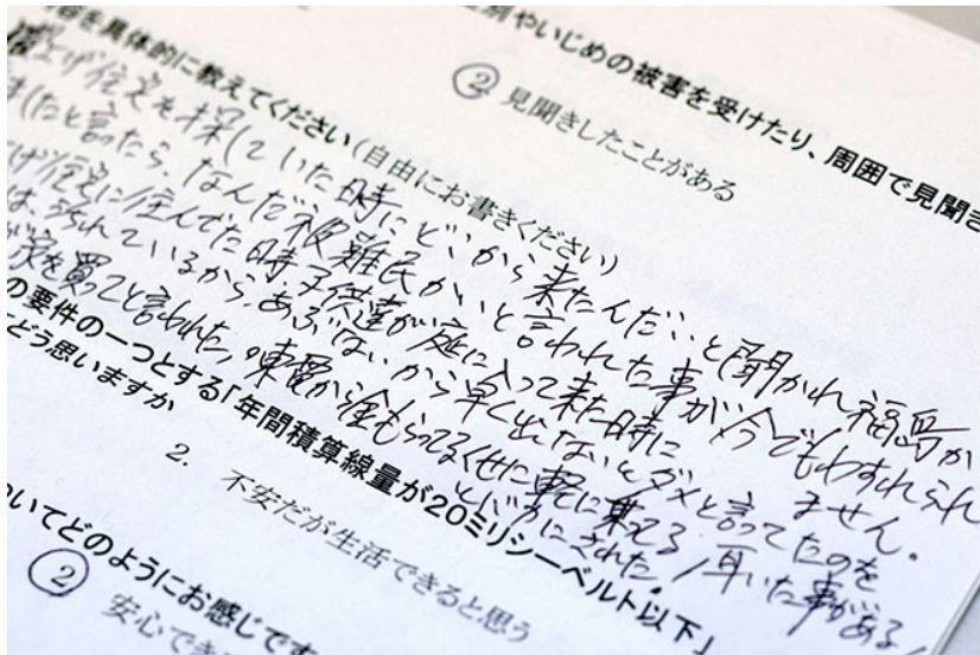
The prefecture is hoping that the improvements in the three countries will help persuade other markets, such as Hong Kong and Taiwan, that its peaches are safe.

The recovery of the fruit's reputation overseas has provided great encouragement to the prefecture's peach growers, including Shigeyoshi Saito, 58, of the city of Date.

"Along with other items, peaches are a main pillar of Fukushima's farm produce," he said. "I hope their good reputation in Southeast Asia will spread the word to the entire world."

This section focuses on topics and issues covered by the Fukushima Minpo, the largest newspaper in Fukushima Prefecture. The original article was published on Feb. 1.

Fukushima evacuees bullied



A man living outside Fukushima Prefecture writes, "When I said that I came from Fukushima, I was told, 'You are an evacuee, aren't you?' I cannot forget that." (Ryota Goto)

February 26, 2017

SIX YEARS AFTER: 60 percent say Fukushima evacuees bullied

By KENJI IZAWA/ Staff Writer

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201702260027.html>

More than 60 percent of current or former evacuees from the Fukushima nuclear crisis said they were victims of bullying or discrimination in areas they evacuated to or witnessed or heard of such incidents, according to a new survey.

The survey, released Feb. 26, was conducted jointly by The Asahi Shimbun and Akira Imai, professor of local governments' policies at Fukushima University, in January and February.

"It is probably the first time that the actual conditions of 'bullying evacuees' became clear in large quantities and concretely," Imai said. "The recognition that evacuees are victims of the nuclear accident is not shared in society. That is leading to the bullying."

The series of surveys started in June 2011, three months after an accident occurred at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant due to the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

In the latest survey, the sixth, The Asahi Shimbun and Imai sent a questionnaire in late January to 348 people who had replied to the series of surveys.

Of these, 184 people of 18 prefectures, including Fukushima Prefecture, gave valid responses. Of the 184, 147 were still evacuees.

The latest survey asked for the first time whether they were bullied or discriminated due to the fact that they evacuated because of the nuclear accident. Thirty-three of the 184, or 18 percent, said that they or their family members became victims of bullying or discrimination.

In addition, 81 of the 184, or 44 percent, replied that they saw or heard of those actions around them.

In a section in which respondents can freely describe their experiences or opinions, a 35-year-old woman wrote, "I was told, 'Why do you work despite the fact that you have money. I felt sad, wondering whether I have no right to work.'"

A 59-year-old man wrote, "When I bought in bulk, I was told, 'Oh! An evacuee.'"

Meanwhile, 60 of the 184 respondents, or 33 percent, responded that they have neither been victims of bullying or discrimination nor have they seen or heard of any acts.

A 48-year-old woman wrote, "Superiors or colleagues in my workplace in the area where I have evacuated have treated me normally. I have been able to encounter good people."

The survey also asked the 147 respondents, who are still evacuees, whether they think they are unwilling to tell people around them the fact that they are evacuating. Sixty-one, or 41 percent, replied that they think so.

In the free description section, a 49-year-old woman wrote, "I have the anxiety that talking (with other people) will lead to discussing compensation money." A 31-year-old woman wrote, "I have a concern that my children could be bullied."

Meanwhile, 50 of the 147 respondents, or 34 percent, replied that they don't have that anxiety about telling people. In addition, 26 of the 147 people, or 18 percent, answered that they don't know whether they think so or not.

A 56-year-old man wrote, "I dare not tell people who do not know that I am evacuating. I cannot move my life forward if I continue to say that I am an evacuee."

Currently, about 80,000 people are living in and outside Fukushima Prefecture as evacuees.

Safety embankment seen as eyesore



February 22, 2017

SIX YEARS AFTER: Ugly river safety embankment draws ire of locals

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201702220061.html>

By HIRONORI KATO/ Staff Writer

Workers reinforce a concrete embankment along the Okinotagawa river in Kesenuma, Miyagi Prefecture. (Video footage by Yosuke Fukudome)

KESENUMA, Miyagi Prefecture--Environmental eyesore or necessary protection against possible natural disasters?

The 800-meter-long, nine-meter tall embankment that runs along both sides of the Okinotagawa river here attracts both praise and criticism.

The embankment, the same height as levees built along the coast, is close to completion and workers are now laying rocks on the river bed to strengthen the structure.

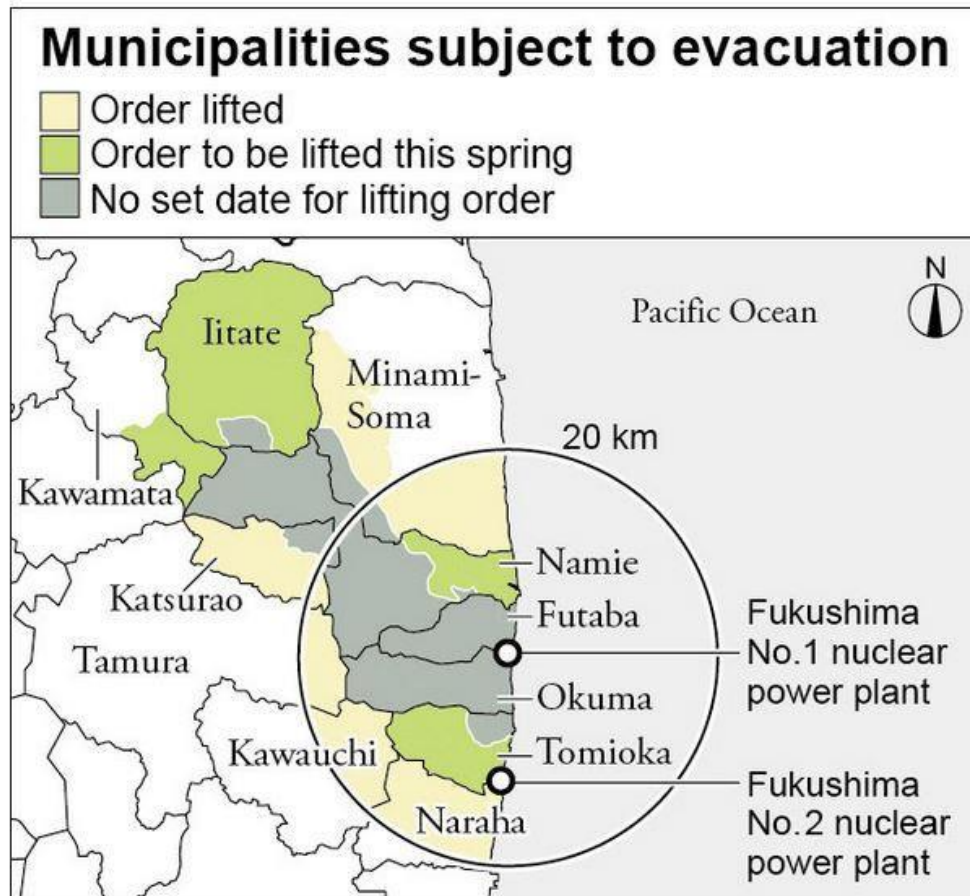
The Okinotagawa river itself has been temporarily diverted to allow for the construction of the embankment, and when the waterway is returned to its usual course it is expected to have a width of about three meters.

Before the embankment project, salmon returned upstream along the river and tadpoles were also seen there.

"It has become a horrible site that has no consideration for the environment or surrounding scenery," complained one 56-year-old man who used to fish in the river.

However, other local residents said safety was the top priority and argued that the delightful natural environment could be enjoyed further upstream.

How safe is safe?



February 28, 2017

SIX YEARS AFTER: 4 more districts in Fukushima set to be declared safe to return to

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201702280051.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Evacuation orders will be lifted shortly for four more municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture, but the prospect of residents returning to their old homes in huge numbers seems unlikely.

The restrictions, in place since the immediate aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear disaster in March 2011, will be lifted by April 1.

About 32,000 residents will be affected, but there is no guarantee that all will soon, if ever, return.

In similar past situations, evacuated residents came back in dribs and drabs, and many never returned.

Authorities in Namie on Feb. 27 decided to accept the central government's proposal to lift the evacuation order for the town on March 31.

This means that orders for the municipalities of Kawamata and Iitate will be lifted the same day, and for Tomioka the day after.

Naraha and Katsurao are among five municipalities that are no longer subject to evacuation orders.

However, only 11 percent of Naraha residents and 9 percent of Katsurao residents have returned.

One reason for the low rates is that evacuees have already established new domiciles elsewhere. Others are concerned about the availability of medical workers in areas where evacuation orders will be lifted.

In the aftermath of the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant triggered by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster, the central government ordered the evacuation of 81,000 residents in 11 Fukushima municipalities.

In 2012-13, the evacuation region was redesignated into three zones: one where returning would continue to be difficult; another where residential areas would be limited; and lastly, where preparations would be made for former residents to return.

In June 2015, the government decreed that all evacuees from the two latter zones should be allowed to return by March 2017. Efforts were made to decontaminate land affected by radiation fallout and to restore social infrastructure.

The next step involves the 24,000 former residents of the zone where returning continues to be considered difficult.

The government intends to pay for the decontamination of certain areas within that zone so former residents can return.

According to one estimate, the program would only cover about 5 percent of the entire area that is designated as difficult to return.

(This article was written by Chikako Kawahara and Osamu Uchiyama.)

More cases of bullying uncovered

February 28, 2017

Bullying cases targeting child evacuees from Fukushima disaster now reported in Tokyo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/02/28/national/social-issues/bullying-cases-targeting-child-evacuees-fukushima-disaster-now-reported-tokyo/#.WLUoDPKDmos>

Kyodo

Fresh cases of bullying have been reported targeting children who evacuated from Fukushima Prefecture amid the nuclear disaster that started in 2011, this time in Tokyo.

According to Tokyo Saigai Shien Netto (Tossnet), a group of lawyers supporting Fukushima evacuees, three schoolchildren who moved to Tokyo in the wake of the triple core meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant were subjected to bullying at an elementary school in Chiyoda Ward between 2011 and 2015.

According to the group, one elementary school student and two others who now study at a junior high school were called names repeatedly, with classmates shunning them by saying radiation might spread from them. One of them recalled being called *kin* (germ).

The group on Monday reported the incidents as cases of bullying to the board of education in Chiyoda Ward. The board of education says it had not been aware of the incidents and will look into facts surrounding them.

Chiyoda Ward is also investigating a separate case in which another student from Fukushima at a junior high school was allegedly forced to buy snacks for three other children at the school.

The revelation comes in the wake of a bullying case in Yokohama, where a 13-year-old boy had been bullied and forced to pay ¥1.5 million to classmates at an elementary school he transferred to amid the disaster.

In that case, the Yokohama Board of Education on Feb. 13 acknowledged the payments made by the boy to classmates in the school were the result of bullying, after initially denying it.

The Yokohama boy entered the elementary school in Yokohama as a second-grader in August 2011, but after being called a “germ” he began missing school in the third grade, according to a report released by the board.

The boy’s parents told the school in May 2014 that their son was a victim of bullying and told the police in July that he was involved in money trouble with his classmates.

Can't recover your belongings



School satchels remain left behind at the entrance of Futaba Minami Elementary School in the same position on Feb. 2 as they were six years ago when the earthquake struck followed by the nuclear disaster in Fukushima Prefecture, forcing the children to evacuate. (Shingo Kuzutani)

February 28, 2017

SIX YEARS AFTER: Abandoned satchels can't be recovered due to nuclear disaster

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201702280054.html>

By SHINGO KUZUTANI/ Staff Writer

FUTABA, Fukushima Prefecture--An untidy pile of school satchels lies beside the doorway of an abandoned school near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. Beside them the shoes of children remain in a rack. Textbooks are discarded.

When the youngsters fled, they were clearly in a rush and were perhaps wearing only indoor soft shoes. These simple daily items give an impression of the turmoil immediately following the March 11, 2011, magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

The children were evacuated and have not been allowed to return due to the nuclear disaster triggered by the quake and tsunami. **The children still cannot return to pick up their belongings because of high radiation levels.**

Reporters have been allowed in to examine the Futaba Minami Elementary School in an area that is still under an evacuation order.

The school itself has been relocated to Iwaki in the same prefecture. It restarted in 2014 with eight pupils, down from the predisaster number of 192.

Fishing boats return to Ukedo port

February 26, 2017

SIX YEARS AFTER: Fukushima port welcomes fishing boats back for 1st time since 2011

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201702260030.html>

By MASAKAZU HONDA/ Staff Writer

NAMIE, Fukushima Prefecture--Fishing boats returned to their home port on Feb. 25 for the first time in six years since the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant wreaked havoc here.

The Ukedo fishing port, located seven kilometers north of the nuclear plant, was destroyed by the tsunami caused by the powerful earthquake in March 2011. In addition, nearby areas of the sea were contaminated by radioactive substances discharged from the crippled plant.

Since then, the reconstruction of the port has started and the work is ongoing.

On Feb. 25, 26 fishing boats entered the port to prepare for the start of the fishing season of "kounago," or young fish of "ikanago" (Japanese sand lance), in mid-March. Fishing is scheduled to resume in waters that are more than 10 km from the nuclear plant.

"This is the first step to return to my life as a fisherman," said a smiling Ichiro Takano, 69, a third-generation fisherman.

See also : Fukushima fishing comeback

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170226/p2a/00m/0na/004000c>

Hidden costs of disaster for people

February 27, 2017

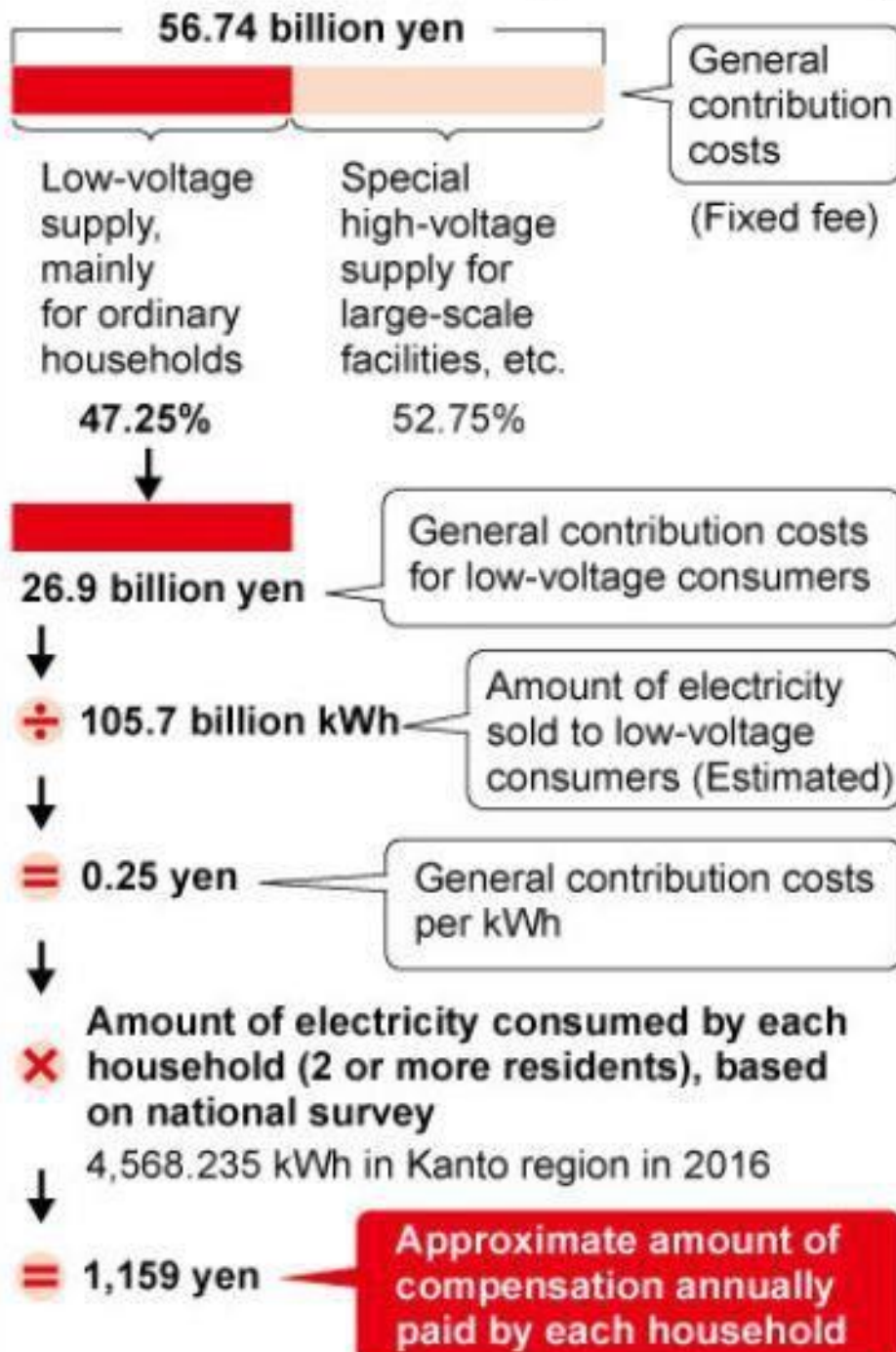
The hidden costs households must pay for nuclear disaster in 2011

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201702270056.html>

By KEISHI NISHIMURA/ Staff Writer

How the amount of compensation paid by each household was calculated

(In the case of TEPCO)



There's more to monthly electricity charges than meets the eye. For one thing, there's a hidden cost. This is charged to help Tokyo Electric Power Co. and other utilities meet costs for damages arising from the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Annual amounts range from an estimated 587 yen (\$5.25) to 1,484 yen, and although paltry, may raise eyebrows as the utilities offer no breakdown in their monthly charges.

The utilities are obliged by the government to pitch in on grounds that a kitty is needed in case of future nuclear accidents. But in reality, the money is being swallowed up to help TEPCO pay compensation.

Of the 7.9 trillion yen in estimated compensation costs for the triple meltdown at TEPCO's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant in 2011, as calculated by the government, 5.5 trillion yen is being borne by the company and six other utilities across the nation as "general contribution" costs.

The other utilities are those based in Hokkaido; the Tohoku region; the Chubu region; the Kansai region; Shikoku; and Kyushu.

The amount of compensation each utility bears depends on the overall capacity of the nuclear power plants they operate, and other factors.

The Asahi Shimbun estimated that these general contributions, which are included in regular household electricity bills, range between 0.11 yen and 0.26 yen per kilowatt-hour, depending on the utility. These figures were then multiplied with the average amount of annual household electricity consumption, as based on a national survey, to ascertain how much each household was paying into the compensation program in a given year.

Households supplied by Shikoku Electric Power Co. bear the heaviest annual burden at 1,484 yen. They were followed by residents supplied by Kansai Electric Power Co. at 1,212 yen and TEPCO at 1,159 yen. Users of Kyushu Electric Power Co. pay 1,127 yen per household, while those using Hokkaido Electric Power Co. pay 1,034 yen. The smallest amounts were charged by Tohoku Electric Power Co. and Chubu Electric Power Co., at 774 yen and 587 yen per household, respectively.

The majority of household residents may be unaware of the hidden fee, or at least how much is being charged, as electricity bills basically just state the amount to be paid each month by a given date.

Utilities generally calculate electricity rates via what is known as the fully-distributed cost method, which means that all expenses necessary in generating and delivering power to households are implemented in the price.

Household electricity payments proved to be a direct source of funding for Fukushima compensation payouts when expenses toward the general contribution program were included in basic cost for calculating electricity rates after the seven utilities increased their charges in fiscal 2012-2014.

The Asahi Shimbun calculated annual general contributions paid by households by figuring out how much of the overall generation cost of utilities was covered by regular households. In the case of TEPCO, ordinary households were responsible for paying 26.9 billion yen, or 47.25 percent of the overall 56.74 billion yen.

Dividing this figure by the estimated amount of electricity that will be consumed by these households in a year reveals how much it costs to generate 1 kWh of electricity.

Representatives of the Kansai and Chubu utilities told The Asahi Shimbun that they make estimates on how much it costs to do this.

Applying the approach used by the two companies, The Asahi Shimbun estimated the costs for the five remaining utilities, all of which confirmed that the methodology was correct.

In the case with TEPCO, the cost was 0.25 yen, after the 26.9 billion yen that households paid was divided by 105.7 billion kWh.

The figure was then multiplied by the amount of electricity annually used by each household with two or more people, information that was obtained through the government's household financial survey. With Tokyo residents consuming an average of 4,568 kWh in 2016, the amount of compensation paid by each household supplied by TEPCO was calculated to be 1,159 yen.

Hokuriku Electric Power Co. and Chugoku Electric Power Co. are also paying for the general contributions, meaning that all nine utilities in mainland Japan are participating in the compensation effort. However, the two companies have neither raised their rates following the nuclear crisis nor included compensation costs in their monthly bills to households.

Utilities will soon be scrambling to find more money, as the government plans to include an additional 2.4 trillion yen worth of compensation costs in fees to use power lines starting in 2020.

The government estimates expenses in dealing with the aftermath of the nuclear disaster six years ago, which include compensation, as well as costs to decommission reactors and decontaminate vast areas of land, at 21.5 trillion yen. These costs will be covered not only by TEPCO, which had paid a "special contribution" fee of up to 180 billion yen by the end of fiscal 2015, but taxes as well.

Govt' s spending on survivors' mental care growing thin

March 1, 2017

Funding for Great East Japan Earthquake survivors' mental care falling

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170301/p2a/00m/0na/012000c>

Nurse Yuko Kijima speaks with a man with dementia who lives alone in Shinchi, Fukushima Prefecture. (Mainichi)

Six years after the Great East Japan Earthquake, funding for survivors' mental care is on a continuing downward trend.

In disaster-hit coastal areas, work has proceeded to set up residential districts on high ground, and this spring most of the areas covered by Fukushima nuclear disaster evacuation orders will have been reopened to residents. The number of evacuees around the country, as announced on Feb. 28 by the Reconstruction Agency and dated to Feb. 13, was down 3,775 people from the previous month, to 123,168. However, even if evacuees are able to return to their pre-disaster homes, it does not mean that their lives will return to pre-disaster norms. Psychological care remains necessary, but funds for this are falling each year.

In a neighborhood of new high-ground homes in the Fukushima Prefecture town of Shinchi, 49-year-old nurse Yuko Kijima from Homon Kango Station Nagomi (visiting nurse station Nagomi) stops her car, and without hesitation rings a doorbell and announces her presence. She is part of a support service targeting people who drop out partway through psychiatric care or stay holed up in their homes, among others. "Even if it looks like the area has recovered, there are many people carrying psychological trauma from the earthquake disaster or suffering from depression," says Kijima.

At another home she visited, a man in his 60s with dementia lay in his room surrounded by trash and partially eaten food. Other than the visiting nurse service, "No one else comes here," the man said.

Disaster recovery funds are being spent on psychological care in Fukushima, Miyagi and Iwate prefectures, including on the Fukushima Prefecture nonprofit organization that manages Homon Kango Station Nagomi. However, government spending on this care has dropped from 1.8 billion yen for the three prefectures in fiscal 2013, to 1.4 billion yen this fiscal year. In fiscal 2013, the NPO received about 49

million yen from the care budget for its outreach programs, but for this fiscal year it received around 24 million yen, although the number of people it is treating has barely changed. Because of this, the Fukushima Prefectural Government has moved money from a separate fund for suicide-prevention, much of it to cover staff expenses.

A representative for the Fukushima Prefectural Government's department for welfare for disabled people says, "Every year we ask the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare to not cut our subsidies. But due to the previous fiscal year's work results not reaching (the level called for by) the funding, the subsidies gets cut, even though the reason the results do not reach (the level called for) is that we can't get enough staff."

Return or not?

March 2, 2017

VOX POPULI: To return 'home' or not is a tough call for evacuees from Fukushima

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201703020029.html>

A large portion of Naraha town in Fukushima Prefecture lies within 20 kilometers of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

When I visited recently, I saw mounds of black bags, presumably filled with contaminated soil. Large trucks rumbled on in endless streams. The town's convenience stores seemed to be flourishing, thanks to an influx of reactor-dismantling crews and reconstruction workers.

After an evacuation order was issued in the immediate aftermath of the March 2011 nuclear disaster, Naraha remained uninhabitable for a long time. It was only 18 months ago that the evacuation order was finally lifted.

"We are merely at the starting line now," said the mayor at the time.

And true to his observation, the town still faces a long, arduous road ahead. So far, only about 10 percent of Naraha's 7,000-plus residents have returned.

I met Takayuki Furuichi, 40, who was among the first to return home. Before the disaster, Furuichi worked at a facility for the disabled in Naraha. After his return, he established an NPO for home-visit nursing care. In addition to visiting the disabled and the elderly, his NPO staffers also provide day-care services for disabled children.

Furuichi said it was his "iji," or stubborn pride, that brought him back to Naraha.

"It's too vexing to just let my hometown remain in this sorry state. I want to provide support for fellow returnees," he said.

But he also feels conflicted. Now overrun with large service vehicles, the town looks completely different from before. And worries about radiation have not gone away.

"I cannot really urge anyone to come home," he lamented.

The lifting of the evacuation order was a step forward. But this also presented a new dilemma to people who had become accustomed to their lives as evacuees. They are still grappling with the tough decision of whether to return home or stay put, or simply hold off any decision for now.

"To use a marathon analogy, Fukushima's reconstruction is at the 30-km point," Reconstruction Minister Masahiro Imamura noted recently. But for people who were forced to leave their homes in 2011, the race has only just begun and is in a fog.

This spring, evacuation orders will be lifted in four municipalities, including the town of Namie. This brings to the townspeople not only a sense of relief, but anxiety and vacillation as well.

At least 20 years needed to return to pre 3/11



Decontamination work is conducted on March 2 in Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, which will no longer be designated an evacuation zone on March 31. (Yosuke Fukudome)

March 3, 2017

SIX YEARS AFTER: Poll: At least 20 years to regain lifestyle, half of Fukushima says

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Half of Fukushima Prefecture residents believe it will take at least another 20 years for them to return to the lives they enjoyed before the 3/11 disaster, according to a new poll.

The Asahi Shimbun and Fukushima Broadcasting Co. contacted prefectural residents on Feb. 25-26 to ask about life after the triple nuclear meltdown crisis following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. It was the seventh in the annual series of polls on the issue.

In the survey, 50 percent of respondents said "more than 20 years" when asked their outlook on the timescale to restore their previous lifestyle. Twenty-one percent said "about 20 years," followed by 16 percent who thought "about 10 years," and 7 percent who responded "about five years."

In the 2013 poll, those who thought it would take more than two decades for them to regain their pre-disaster life totaled 60 percent. The numbers cannot simply be cross-referenced since 18 and 19 years

olds have been included in the latest survey for the first time, but while the results suggest some improvement, they also paint a picture of many residents of the prefecture still unable to have an optimistic outlook on their future.

Thirty percent of respondents of the latest survey said there are times they feel discriminated against for being Fukushima Prefecture residents.

The central government plans to cover part of the costs on the Fukushima nuclear crisis that is estimated to rise to 21.5 trillion yen (\$188 billion) by including the expenses in electricity rates on regular households.

It is a plan that has been criticized to be nothing more than a scheme to bail out Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, and 76 percent of respondents said they could not accept such a measure.

With the evacuation order for the town of Tomioka scheduled to be lifted on April 1, most residents of the prefecture who were displaced from their homes due to the nuclear disaster will be able to go back, excluding those who lived in areas still designated as “difficult-to-return zones.”

But opinions over the issue varied among respondents, suggesting skepticism over decontamination work and concerns over radiation still linger among many residents.

When asked about the timing of lifting the evacuation order, the most popular answer, from 40 percent, was that it was an appropriate decision. However, 19 percent said it was “too soon,” while 22 percent said the order “should not be lifted in the first place.” Nine percent said it was “too late.”

Respondents were also divided over their evaluation of decontamination work in the prefecture conducted by the central and local governments.

Those who applauded the effort, which comprised the 3 percent who “highly” praised it and the 48 percent who “somewhat” did, was at just over half. But an almost equal amount of respondents, 46 percent, expressed criticism, with 39 percent saying they “did not really” think enough was being done and 7 percent saying they were not at all satisfied.

When asked whether they had any concerns of the effects of radiation on themselves or their family, most residents, at 63 percent, said yes. This comprised the 19 percent who said they were very concerned and the 44 percent who responded they were worried to some extent.

Those who were more critical of the decontamination efforts, as well as respondents who expressed concern over the effects of radiation, tended to reply that the evacuation order “should not be lifted in the first place.”

Regarding “difficult-to-return zones,” the central government plans to concentrate their decontamination work on specific areas to allow residents to live there.

Respondents were divided over this decision as well, with 43 percent for and 42 percent against.

However, when asked about how the central government and TEPCO were handling the buildup of contaminated groundwater at the crippled nuclear plant, the majority of respondents expressed criticism. A total of 71 percent said they were dissatisfied, compared with the 14 percent who thought enough was being done.

The poll targeted eligible voters aged 18 or older living in the prefecture. Valid responses were received from 934 individuals out of the 1,739 randomly generated landline numbers contacted, or 54 percent.

Still suffering from effects of 3/11

March 6, 2017

Survey: Over 60% feel effects of 3/11 disaster

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20170306_08/

An NHK survey on survivors and nuclear evacuees of the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami shows over 60 percent of respondents still feel physical and psychological effects from the disaster.

The survey was conducted from November to February ahead of the 6th anniversary of the disaster next Saturday.

NHK contacted 5,000 people in the hardest-hit northeastern prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima, including evacuees from the nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant. 1,437 responded.

The questionnaire asked whether they feel physical and psychological effects from the disaster. 29 percent of respondents said they do, and 32 percent said they do to some degree.

Asked what symptoms they have, 32 percent said feelings of depression and 31 percent cited insomnia. 30 percent said they have a need for medication.

The survey asked people to describe their lives. A 69-year-old resident of Namie Town, Fukushima Prefecture, wrote that his wife died after her disease worsened due to stress from the evacuation. He said he has been despondent about everything since then.

A 71-year-old resident of Kesenuma City, Miyagi Prefecture, wrote that she has been living alone since her husband died and feels worried about her financial, mental and physical condition.

Associate Professor Reo Kimura of the University of Hyogo says survivors who have been unable to rebuild their homes or lives feel ongoing effects of the disaster due to frustration and a sense of isolation.

Kimura says it is becoming very important for officials and volunteers to care about survivors on an individual basis.

VOX POPULI: Full impact of 3/11 disaster is now being felt by youngest victims

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201703060028.html>

When I recently visited the Hideshima fishing port in Miyako, Iwate Prefecture, I found the gentle waves of the spring sea lapping against a new seawall.

I went to the port in the city, which was devastated by the massive tsunami triggered by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, to meet Asato Sasaki, a 10-year-old boy who lost his father, a fisherman, in the disaster.

The fifth-grader, with short hair framing his round face, speaks in a brisk and lively manner.

Besides his father, the tsunami also swept away Asato's great-grandmother and house.

He has written about his current thoughts and feelings about what happened six years ago and won the top prize in a national essay contest.

"I couldn't even imagine or think what happened and what kind of future would await me," he wrote. "Ever since that day, I have been unable to remember my father, who disappeared into the sea."

Asato was in kindergarten on the day the disaster occurred. The taste of the Bisco biscuits he ate while taking cover under a desk is almost all that he remembers about that day.

Recently, however, the boy suddenly found himself longing to know more about his father.

Asato has asked other family members about what they remember about him and visited the fish market.

"My father, wanting to work on the sea, got married with my mother and worked really hard," he wrote. "I wish I had a chance of seeing him actively working on a ship."

The waters off the Sanriku Coast in the Tohoku Region's areas on the Pacific Ocean are known as a great fishing ground because two major ocean currents--the Oyashio current and the Kuroshio current--converge there.

"I hope I will also become a man of the sea someday ... I asked the sea to watch over me fondly," he wrote. Many people in disaster-hit areas are still struggling to deal with their feelings about the loved ones they have lost.

Some are suffering from an incurable sense of loss, while others are picking up fragments of memories of the deceased.

Many of the children who experienced the disaster before becoming old enough to understand what's what are now beginning to feel a strong desire to get some solid mental images of family members who died in the tragedy.

The disaster left more than 18,000 people dead or missing. Asato's father, Yuta, is one of them. He was 28. On March 5, the boy was scheduled to attend a memorial service marking the sixth anniversary of the deaths of the disaster victims.

--The Asahi Shimbun, March 5

The clock is ticking for "voluntary" evacuees

March 7, 2017

Financial crunch time looms for Fukushima's 'voluntary evacuees'

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/03/07/national/social-issues/financial-crunch-time-looms-fukushimas-voluntary-evacuees/>

by Satoshi Iizuka

Kyodo

This month, housing subsidies run out for those who fled the Fukushima nuclear disaster from areas other than the government-designated evacuation zones, and as the clock ticks down, evacuees have had to decide whether to return or move once again.

Many of these so-called voluntary evacuees are mothers seeking to avoid risking their children's health while their husbands remain in radiation-hit Fukushima Prefecture, according to freelance journalist Chia Yoshida.

This is why the term “voluntary evacuee” is misleading, as it gives the impression that they fled Fukushima for selfish reasons, Yoshida told a news conference in January in Tokyo.

At the same news conference, another journalist proposed using the term “domestic refugee” to describe them.

The Fukushima Prefectural Government has been paying the cost of public and private housing for voluntary evacuees under the Disaster Relief Act since the reactors melted down at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant after the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

The number of evacuees from the disaster, including those from mandatory evacuation areas, peaked at 164,865 as of May 2012, according to the prefectural government.

Its latest tally, conducted earlier this year, shows that 11,321 out of the 12,239 voluntary evacuee households had already decided where to live after April, while 250 had not.

It was back in June 2015 when Fukushima announced the plan to end the rent subsidy this month, saying that decontamination work in the prefecture had advanced and food safety had been achieved.

Still, the central government’s evacuation orders have not been lifted in “difficult-to-return zones,” which include the towns of Futaba and Okuma, home to the crippled nuclear facility.

Those no-entry areas are subject to radiation of over 50 millisieverts per year, compared with the government’s long-term annual target of less than 1 millisievert after decontamination work.

Rika Mashiko, 46, is a voluntary evacuee living in Tokyo. She has decided to rent a house near the Fukushima-paid apartment where she and her daughter, now in elementary school, are currently living so that her daughter will not miss her friends.

Mashiko and her daughter fled Fukushima about two months after the nuclear crisis started, leaving behind her husband in their house in Miharu, located in the center of the prefecture.

Mashiko said many women evacuated from Fukushima with their children, compelled by their instinct as mothers to avoid danger.

“Maybe nothing might have happened, but if it had, it would have been too late,” she said.

Mashiko, who first moved to a house in Higashiyamato in eastern Tokyo that was leased for free, said mothers like her who fled the nuclear disaster feel they shouldn’t have to pay their housing costs and are angry at being “victims of the state’s nuclear policy.”

Many voluntary evacuees are financially struggling as they have to cover the double living costs in their hometowns, where typically the fathers remain, and the new places where the mothers and children moved.

In that sense, the free housing has been a “lifeline” for them, particularly in the Tokyo metropolitan area where housing costs are high, according to journalist Yoshida.

In an attempt to extend support to those families, Makoto Yamada, a veteran pediatrician in Tokyo, established a fund with ¥3 million out of his own pocket to help them rent new houses, for example by covering the deposit.

The initiative was the latest example of the support he has been providing to evacuees. Three months after the disaster, he held a counseling session in the city of Fukushima that attracted some 400 people concerned about radiation exposure. He has continued to hold similar sessions in Tokyo.

Yamada, 75, says poor understanding of the plight of voluntary evacuees has also played a role in bullying cases involving evacuee children that have been reported across Japan since last year.

In one high-profile case, a first-year junior high school student in Yokohama was called a “germ” at school, in reference to his supposed exposure to radiation.

Society appears to generally feel that voluntary evacuees have received a lot of money on top of the one-time compensation payment made by Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc., the operator of Fukushima No. 1.

Yamada says if people understood that voluntary evacuees had no wish to leave but felt they had to, such bullying would disappear.

The first financial support from Yamada's fund went to 10 mothers and their children on Jan. 15. He was surprised to see the recipients shed tears of joy upon receiving ¥200,000 or ¥300,000 each.

Yamada said the government has tried to reduce the number of evacuees from Fukushima in order to claim that their ranks have decreased and that the disaster has been overcome.

Yoshida echoed that view, describing the voluntary evacuees as "people who will be eliminated from history as the government seeks to trivialize the damage from radiation contamination and say their evacuation was unnecessary."

As long as there are evacuees living outside Fukushima, they will remain a symbol showing the situation has yet to be solved, Yamada said.

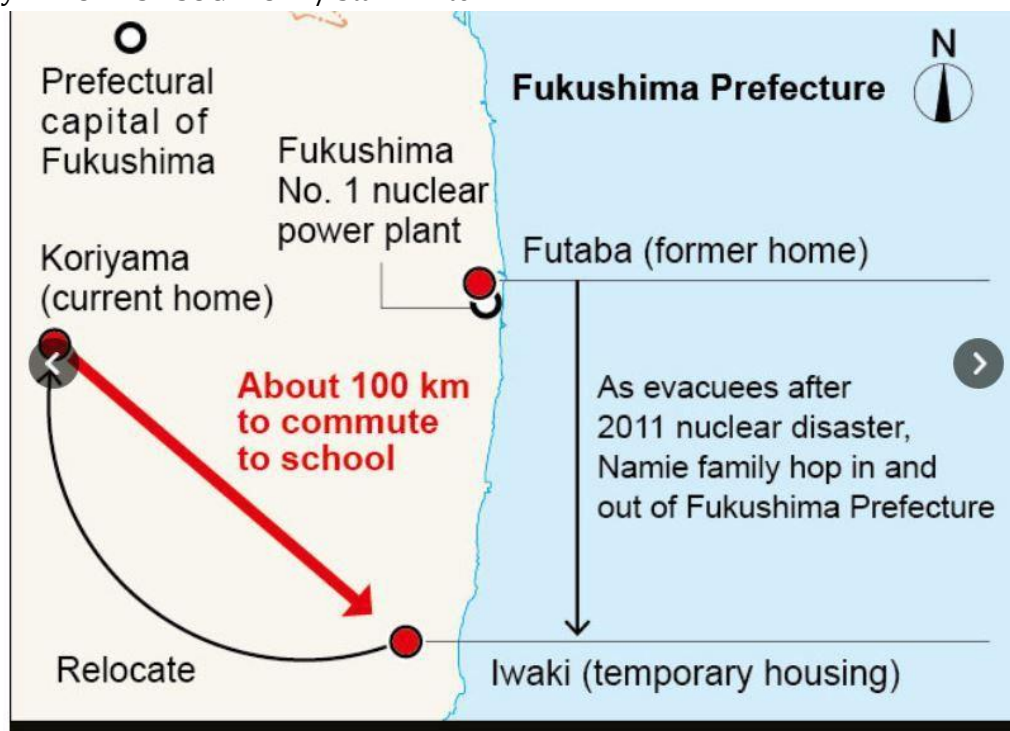
"If you say 'we will not forget about Fukushima,' you should never forget the terror of radiation, bearing in mind that people will not live in safety as long as nuclear plants exist in the world," he said. "So, I want to continue to think about the evacuees."

100 km to go to school

March 7, 2017

SIX YEARS AFTER: Father, daughter grow closer through 100-km drives to school

By KAZUMASA SUGIMURA/ Staff Writer



KORIYAMA, Fukushima Prefecture--The near-daily drives start around 6 a.m. from the latest home of Katsuhiko Namie here.

Weary from only a few hours of sleep, he takes the wheel for a 90-minute drive to Iwaki, 100 kilometers away, with his daughter, Yuka, fast asleep in the passenger's seat.

It's a routine he has continued for two years, despite the often wintry conditions and his deteriorated health from trying to rebuild after the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

But when he sees the progress his 15-year-old daughter has made at her school in Iwaki and her positive attitude toward life, Namie knows the sacrifice is well worth it.

The Namie family's life was turned upside down in March 2011, when they were forced to flee from Futaba, a town co-hosting the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Over the five months following the triple meltdown, Namie, his wife, his mother, Yuka, who was a third-grader at that time, and another daughter ended up staying at six locations in and outside of Fukushima Prefecture. They finally found a sense of stability when they moved to a temporary housing unit in Iwaki. Two years later, Namie, a 54-year-old company employee, decided to start afresh in Koriyama by building a new home there.

With the house still under construction, and the family living in the temporary housing unit, word spread that the shuttered Futaba Junior High School would resume classes for its students by setting up classrooms in Iwaki in April 2014.

Yuka was eager to be reunited with her classmates from Futaba.

"I want to go to school there," she excitedly told her father.

Namie approved the idea, agreeing that it would be for only a year.

All 7,000 residents from Futaba are now dispersed in Tokyo, Hokkaido and 36 other prefectures.

Although only three of Yuka's classmates from her elementary school in Futaba attended the reopened school, a profound change occurred in Yuka after she joined the classes.

Long known as introverted, Yuka became more active and open-minded. She had not been good at sports, but she joined a badminton club at school and competed in the long jump at an athletic meet.

And her academic performance improved.

About half a year after she started attending the classes in Iwaki, Yuka told her father that she wanted to continue going to the school, insisting that she never wants to be separated from her friends again.

"I do not want to transfer to another school," she said.

Yuka's remarks came as no surprise to her father.

But the home in Koriyama was near completion. And if the family moved there, Namie and Yuka would have to wake up at 5 a.m. on weekdays for the 90-minute drive to Iwaki.

Namie finally gave in, worried that transferring Yuka to another school would have a negative effect on her progress and positivity she made in Iwaki.

The family moved to Koriyama, and Namie's long early morning drives to Iwaki began.

He initially wanted to find a job in Koriyama but decided to continue working in Iwaki for a company that manages temporary housing to make it easier to pick up Yuka for the drive home.

The travel forces them to catch an average of about four hours of sleep a day.

Namie also takes medicine to deal with his high blood pressure, a condition he developed during the ordeal of evacuating from one place to the next.

Before the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, triggered the nuclear disaster, Yuka had been too shy to speak in public.

But she managed to give accounts of her experiences in the nuclear disaster before an audience of students from other schools.

At junior high school, she became even more outgoing over the past two years. And her athletic ability soared. As a third-year student, she entered the 100-meter sprint at a competition and became the first student to move on to the prefectural meet since the junior high school reopened.

Yuka, who is good at English, aspires for a career that will take her overseas.

Lately, her sleep time has shrunk. She sometimes goes to bed shortly before 1 a.m. after doing homework and preparing for exams. She catches up on shut-eye warmed by the heater in the car as the vehicle moves through the chilly February weather.

“I also draw solace that my daughter attends the junior high school that both myself and my wife had graduated from,” Namie said.

Although the family members still consider Futaba as their hometown, they will be unable to return to their original home anytime soon. Ninety-six percent of Futaba is a government-designated “difficult-to-return zone” because of the high radiation levels there.

Despite the difficulties that the family has faced, Namie said that in some ways he thinks he is a “fortunate father.”

“I could closely watch my daughter grow up through our drives to her school,” he said.

Starting this spring, Yuka will attend a senior high school in Koriyama. The father-daughter daily long commutes together will come to an end on March 13.

Father's hope



Solar-powered flower-shaped lights glimmer near some flowers on the abandoned land of the former Ukedo post office, which was engulfed by the tsunami spawned by the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake, in Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, on Feb. 16. (Shigetaka Kodama)

SIX YEARS AFTER: Father lights up abandoned land in Fukushima for missing son

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201703070059.html>

By SHIGETAKA KODAMA/ Staff Writer

NAMIE, Fukushima Prefecture--Lonely lights glow in the dark in a deserted area near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, a symbol of a father's resolute hope that his missing son may yet return.

The flower-shaped lights are solar-powered, charging during daytime and automatically turning on after sunset.

"I thought if I put lights here, my son will come home," said Kazuo Sato, 75. "Six years have passed, but I still cannot give up."

Sato's son, Kenichi, 41, had been sent to work at the Ukedo post office here from Naraha post office in Naraha, also in Fukushima Prefecture, just before the disaster.

The Ukedo district was engulfed by the tsunami triggered by the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011, and Kenichi has not been seen since.

The area, still subject to an evacuation order due to the nuclear disaster, is almost completely dark, as nobody lives here and no street lights remain. But with Sato's glimmer of hope, he wanted to light up the darkness for his missing son.

How many will return?

March 8, 2017

Survey: Fewer evacuees want to return to Fukushima

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20170308_01/

A Japanese government survey shows that fewer people who fled the 2011 nuclear accident want to return to their hometowns in Fukushima Prefecture. Many younger people are reluctant to go back.

The Reconstruction Agency and other institutions conduct an annual survey of the residents of areas where an evacuation order remains in place. The fiscal 2016 survey covered 5 municipalities -- the towns of Tomioka, Futaba, Namie and Kawamata, and Iitate Village.

Compared with the fiscal 2014 survey, the number of people who do not wish to return increased in all 5 municipalities.

In Futaba, the number rose 6.6 percentage points to 62.3 percent. Tomioka saw an 8.2-point increase at 57.6 percent. The figure for Namie was up 4.2 points, or 52.6 percent. Kawamata saw an increase of 8.5 points, or 31.1 percent. In Iitate, the figure rose 4.3 points, or 30.8 percent.

More than 50 percent of people under the age of 40 in these municipalities said they do not want to go back. Some said they have concerns about the quality of health care services in their hometowns. They

also think their lives would be less convenient. Some said they have already settled elsewhere.

The Reconstruction Agency says it will provide a good living environment and create jobs in these areas.

To be demolished

March 9, 2017

Fukushima laden with piles of radioactive soil that can't be moved into storage



Masaaki Sakai faces his home, which remains standing in the Fukushima Prefecture village of Iitate, on Feb. 15, 2017. In some spots the level of radiation exceeds 1 microsievert per hour, and Sakai has decided to have the structure demolished. (Mainichi)

Masaaki Sakai faces his home, which remains standing in the Fukushima Prefecture village of Iitate, on Feb. 15, 2017. In some spots the level of radiation exceeds 1 microsievert per hour, and Sakai has decided to have the structure demolished. (Mainichi)

FUKUSHIMA -- As decontamination planned in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster nears an end this fiscal year, focus is shifting to the massive amount of radioactively tainted soil that has piled up during decontamination work. But the construction of interim storage facilities that are supposed to hold this waste within Fukushima Prefecture for up to 30 years before it is finally disposed of has been delayed. As of the end of February, only about 20 percent of the 16,000 hectares earmarked for interim storage has been acquired through land contracts. It thus appears inevitable that provisional and onsite storage that was only supposed to last for three years will drag on for a long time. The situation casts doubt on the prospects of finding a final resting place for the waste outside Fukushima Prefecture within 30 years.

Six years after the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, the Fukushima Prefecture village of Iitate remains completely evacuated. With the exception of a so-called "difficult to return zone" in the south of the village, the central government plans to lift the evacuation order upon completion of decontamination work at the end of March.

Masaaki Sakai, 39, who now resides in the city of Fukushima, has a home in the Komiya district of Iitate, right next to the village's "difficult to return" zone. A dosimeter during a recent visit showed the area around the 60-year-old, snow-covered farmhouse stood at more than 1 microsievert per hour. The level equates to more than 5 millisieverts per year -- five times the 1 millisievert exposure limit for a regular person.

Sakai points out that level of radiation is sometimes higher. "Today the level is low because there is snow," he says. In the near future he plans to have his home pulled down, as the deadline for applying for the government to cover the cost of doing so is approaching.

"Even if I want to return to Iitate, if they say, 'Decide now' then the only thing I can do is decide not to return," he murmurs.

One of the reasons behind Sakai's decision not to return is the radioactively contaminated soil that remains in the village. Walking around the village, one can see mounds with green covers over them, concealing flexible containers that hold contaminated soil. According to the Ministry of the Environment, the amount of tainted soil stored temporarily like this, as of the end of January, totals roughly 2.4 million cubic meters for the village of Iitate alone, or enough to fill the Tokyo Dome baseball stadium twice.

So far, however, only about 6,000 cubic meters of soil have been transported to interim storage facilities, while the amount due to be transported next fiscal year stands at about 22,000 cubic meters. At this pace, under a simple calculation, it would take over 100 years to transport all of the waste to interim storage facilities.

"There's no way I'm going to live surrounded by mountains of contaminated soil," Sakai says.

Makeshift storage of radioactive soil in areas that have not been evacuated also looks likely to be prolonged. In areas that aren't under evacuation orders, it is the local municipalities, not the government, that handle the decontamination work. In five municipalities including the cities of Fukushima and Koriyama, the contaminated soil left after decontamination work is mostly buried onsite.

Six years have passed since the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, and in many cases people have asked for the waste to be removed so they can extend or rebuild their homes or resume farming activities, but the delay in building interim storage facilities means the only solution for the time being is to change the spot where the waste is buried.

It costs several hundred thousand yen to rebury waste in a single case, but until now the Ministry of the Environment has not allowed funds to be used for the reburying of such waste, on the premise that it is supposed to be stored for only a short period of time. Local bodies have still billed the central government by quietly tacking on the cost to the fee for other decontamination work, but this will become more difficult to do next fiscal year when decontamination work is completed.

In January, the Ministry of the Environment adopted a new policy of granting funds for the reburying of waste if the original location hindered the construction of a new home. An official at one local body commented that the move was a relief, but there are outstanding issues. As a rule, the government collectively bills Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), operator of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, for the cost of decontamination work, but it is unclear whether TEPCO has to pay for the reburial of tainted soil.

Separately, decontamination work has also been carried out in prefectures besides Fukushima -- extending to 57 municipalities in seven prefectures, including Tochigi and Miyagi. The amount of

contaminated soil in these cases stands at about 320,000 cubic meters. In about 95 percent of cases, the soil is stored onsite. But since interim storage facilities are designed for contaminated soil from Fukushima Prefecture alone, it has not even been decided what should be done with this waste.

Feeling harassed

March 9, 2017

Nearly 50% of Fukushima evacuees felt harassed

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20170309_06/

A survey has found that nearly half of the former residents of Fukushima who were forced to evacuate their homes following the 2011 nuclear disaster experienced harassment of some sort.

NHK joined hands with Waseda University and others to survey households from four municipalities in the prefecture near the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

Of some 741 people who responded, 334 said that they have felt harassed or suffered emotional distress.

In the multiple-choice survey, 274 cited harassment linked to compensation they were entitled to.

In 197 cases, victims felt stressed by those who noted their evacuee status. Another 127 replies were related to the nuclear fallout.

One family was barred from a community event on the grounds they were evacuees. The car of another family was vandalized. Another victim was told he or she didn't need a wage hike or new qualifications as the family had received compensation.

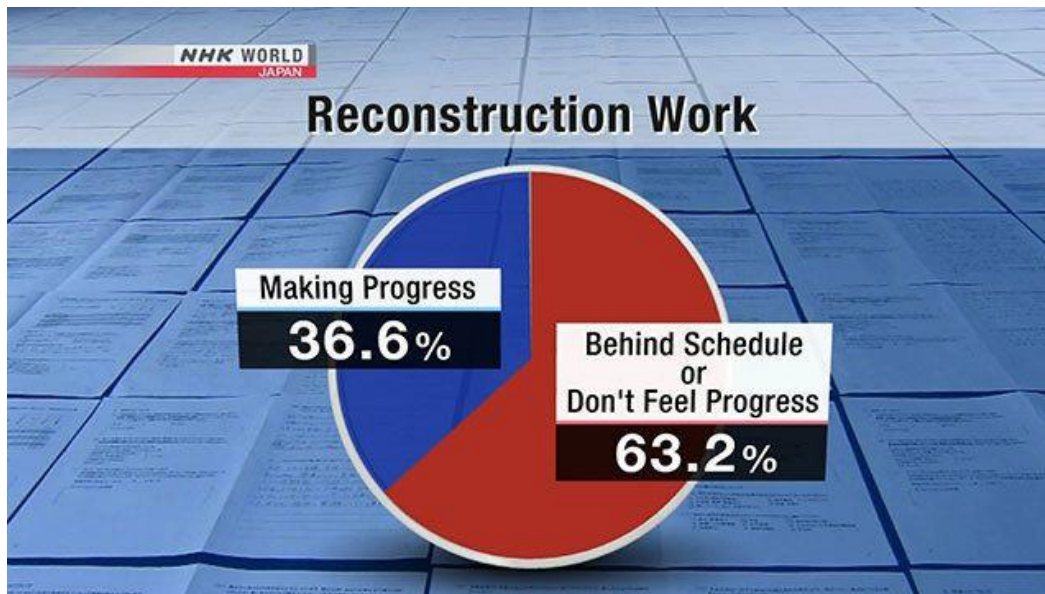
The survey showed that evacuees from Fukushima were harassed as much as their children due to prejudice and other factors.

A father, whose two children were subject to bullying after fleeing from Fukushima, said he, too, was told he wouldn't need to work because if he complained to the operator of the plant, he will receive money. He told NHK he no longer tells anyone they are from Fukushima.

Waseda University professor Takuya Tsujiuchi says people have forgotten that compensation is provided to people whose hometowns were rendered uninhabitable in the disaster.

He noted the need for society to realize that victims of the nuclear disaster continue to be penalized.

NHK video: Many dissatisfied with recovery



March 9, 2017

Many dissatisfied with recovery

An NHK survey shows that a majority of survivors of the March 2011 disaster in northeast Japan are not satisfied with recovery efforts to date.

NHK video : 123,000



<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/nhknewsline/numbersoftheday/2017030901/>

Six years after a massive earthquake and tsunami devastated parts of northeast Japan, more than 123,000 people remain evacuees and many of them still live in temporary housing.

What Olympic effects?

March 9, 2017

SIX YEARS AFTER: Asahi survey: Disaster victims pessimistic over Olympics effect

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201703090043.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Less than one in five of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami victims expect the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics to benefit the recovery of areas impacted by the disasters, according to an Asahi Shimbun survey.

On the other hand, the survey found some evidence of growing optimism, as a higher proportion of respondents agreed with the statement “the events would be a good opportunity to raise affected areas’ profile to the world.”

The Asahi Shimbun in February mailed questionnaires to 906 people from the hardest-hit prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima in the northeastern Tohoku region. It received 564 responses.

Only 18 percent of respondents said holding the sporting events would enhance the reconstruction of affected areas, while 25 percent said it would negatively impact those efforts, and 24 percent said it would have no effect.

Answering a multiple-choice question about their impact on the stricken areas, 58 percent of respondents said the Olympics-related construction rush would delay reconstruction work in the affected areas, the most chosen answer. Forty-eight percent said memories of the disaster would fade away, while 54 percent of respondents in Fukushima Prefecture said damage caused by the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant accident would be forgotten.

The Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, caused the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, triggering massive leaks of radioactive material.

The survey also showed that 22 percent thought the Olympics and Paralympics would be a good opportunity to raise affected areas’ profile to the world, 9 percentage points up from the 2014 survey in which The Asahi Shimbun asked the same question.

Meanwhile, the Consumer Affairs Agency on March 8 released the results of the government’s latest poll on consumer consciousness and radiation in food that was conducted in February.

According to that survey, 15 percent of respondents said they were reluctant to purchase items produced in Fukushima Prefecture, a 4.4 point drop from the first survey that was conducted in 2013, and the lowest figure since then.

(This article was written by Ryota Goto and Naohito Honda.)

Read other recent stories about the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami as well as the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Ghostly voice leads wife to handle grief by writing letters
3/11 tsunami banner evokes the unimaginable in Tokyo's Ginza
Keeping foreign visitors safe the focus of Tokyo earthquake drill
Father, daughter grow closer through 100-km drives to school
Father lights up abandoned land in Fukushima for missing son
2 suns appear to be rising over a bay in Miyagi Prefecture
Poll: At least 20 years to regain lifestyle, half of Fukushima says
Abandoned satchels can't be recovered due to nuclear disaster
4 more districts in Fukushima set to be declared safe to return to
Fukushima port welcomes fishing boats back for 1st time since 2011
60 percent say Fukushima evacuees bullied
Ugly river safety embankment draws ire of locals
70 unidentified tsunami victims reach official resting place
Haunting Miyagi symbol of 2011 tsunami gets a fresh paint job
Tsunami-hit hotel in Iwate continues to draw visitors

"Beacon of hope"

March 8, 2017

Beacon of Hope

<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/nhknewsline/33/beaconofhope/>

- Urara Ito

A local factory has been turning debris into something that can be used to rebuild a tsunami-hit city in northeastern Japan.

Ofunato, in Iwate prefecture, was one of the areas hardest hit by the 2011 disaster. Six years after the unprecedented devastation, rebuilding continues there. What makes the city stand out is that people there turned tsunami debris into concrete.

The tsunami on March 11, 2011, engulfed thousands of homes and buildings -- as well as the largest cement factory in the region. One of the factory's kilns survived, however, and it became a beacon of hope for the city. Many of the factory's employees lost family members and homes in the disaster, but they came back to work at the plant.

"As I recall, we assembled all our employees and declared to them, 'Let's resurrect our factory together,' says Atsuhiko Koike, the former manufacturing manager at Taiheiyo Cement.

The tsunami turned the city into 850,000 tons of rubble. City officials wanted to recycle the debris by using it to make cement, so they teamed up with waste treatment personnel and the factory workers.

But that process was no easy task. Every bit of debris had to be separated into 3 groups: wood, metal and other nonflammables. The workers were joined by their neighbors -- people who also lost homes and loved ones. They separated the debris by hand.

"Whether wood or a lump of concrete, originally it was our homes, our property," says Mutsuo Hiraoka. As if the sorting wasn't enough of a challenge, there was an even bigger problem. The debris was seeped in salt.

"You need to put rebar in cement but if there's salt, it makes the iron corrode. So we needed to get rid of the salt in order to make cement," Koike says.

A lab in Osaka volunteered its services. First they tried a 50-meter conveyor belt that would shower the debris with water, but the process took too long. They went through 7 months of trial and error, and came up with a special machine.

"Imagine it's like using a washing machine put sideways. Things inside are rotated in a centrifuge in water and it can even take salt out of wood fiber," says Junji Kitazaki, an official at the industrial waste treatment company Rematec.

Each load took 5 minutes and with their machines, they were able to desalt 500 tons of rubble per day. Eventually it was time to restart the surviving kiln.

"It was like a ritual to put a soul into the kiln. It was a ceremony where everybody that was present was feeling something special," Koike says.

A city lost, became a city reborn.

"I think everyone participated in the process because they wanted to rebuild their own city as soon as possible," says Junichiro Mori, an official at the Industrial waste treatment company Rematec.

Last year, another powerful earthquake struck southern Japan. The factory is now using debris from that disaster to once again help people rebuild their lives.

Still having to face school bullies

March 10, 2017

Six years on, Fukushima child evacuees face menace of school bullies

by Thomas Wilson and Minami Funakoshi

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/03/10/national/social-issues/six-years-fukushima-child-evacuees-face-menace-school-bullies/#.WMLaufKISos>

Reuters

"Radiation! Bang bang!"

Gesturing as if with guns, two boys in Tokyo repeatedly taunted a girl whose family fled to the capital to escape radioactivity unleashed by the Fukushima nuclear crisis in 2011.

Tormented by headaches and weight loss, the girl began to skip classes, and switched schools to escape the bullies, her mother said. But the very radiation that uprooted the family brought more pain in her new home.

"For her to be called 'radioactive' was heartbreaking," said the mother, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Six years after an earthquake and tsunami sparked the Fukushima meltdown, several cases of bullying have prompted discrimination similar to that suffered by survivors of the World War II atom bombs. The country has long grappled with bullying, but discrimination against Fukushima evacuees is a serious problem, with a government panel last month urging greater efforts to safeguard such children. It called for better mental care in schools and asked teachers to improve their understanding of the disaster's likely psychological and physical effects, besides watching for signs of bullying, so that it can be stopped.

Discrimination over the March 11, 2011 nuclear calamity, the worst since Chernobyl in 1986, appears widespread. Nearly two-thirds of Fukushima evacuees faced prejudice or knew of some who did, a recent poll by the Asahi newspaper showed.

One boy suffered years of bullying after fleeing from Fukushima aged around 8, a regional educational board found in an investigation prompted by the family's lawyers.

Students in his new home in the city of Yokohama hit and kicked the boy, calling him a "germ." They also demanded a share of the evacuee compensation they believed he was receiving.

The boy, who is now 14 and wants to remain anonymous, paid them ¥1.5 million (\$13,200) to avoid physical abuse, the family's lawyer said.

"I thought of dying many times," he wrote at the time. "They treated me like a germ because of the radiation."

The board had initially refused to investigate, heeding only the written request of the lawyers, said one of them, Kei Hida.

Bullying, known as *ijime*, is one aspect of the immense pressure facing children to conform, with the most recent data showing a record 224,540 cases in 2015.

The new guidelines for disaster-stricken children supplement laws adopted four years ago requiring better measures in schools to detect and prevent bullying.

The scale of abuse is impossible to gauge, as child evacuees rarely protest.

But more than half face some form of it, said Yuya Kamoshita, leader of an evacuees' rights group.

"Evacuees tend to stick out, and are easily categorized as 'different,' which makes them prone to bullying," he said.

Schools and education boards' efforts to tackle the problem have fallen short, he and other lawyers said.

The cases are reminiscent of victims of the 1945 bombings of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, whose radiation exposure led to discrimination in marriage and at work over mistaken fears of infection, or birth defects in their children.

The bullying of Fukushima evacuees springs from similar prejudice, say victims, raising fears of the treatment they will encounter as adults.

"Children who were in Fukushima may be unable to get married when they grow up, or their husbands may wonder whether they can have babies," said the girl's mother, who is from Iwaki, a city 50 km (31 miles) south of the nuclear plant. "I think this anxiety will stay with her."

Bullying has a corrosive effect, said Masaharu Tsubokura, a Fukushima doctor who has treated disaster survivors and worked to spread understanding of radiation.

"Some children can resist bullying, they can talk back," he said. "But others cannot, they just hide themselves away. They lose their confidence and dignity."

March 8, 2017

Evacuated Fukushima children victims of bullying

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20170309_01/

An NHK survey of former residents of Fukushima who fled the 2011 nuclear disaster has found that dozens of children were bullied at their new schools.

NHK joined hands with Waseda University and others to survey more than 9,500 households from the four municipalities in the prefecture near the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

741 families from the towns of Okuma, Futaba, and Tomioka, as well as Minamisoma City, responded to the questionnaire ahead of the sixth anniversary of the disaster on March 11.

54 replied that their children were bullied at schools and other places because they had evacuated on account of the nuclear disaster. Three were kindergarteners, and 28 were in elementary school. 21 others were either in junior high or senior high school.

In the multiple-choice survey, 32 replied they were verbally harassed. 22 were ostracized, 13 experienced violence, and 5 were told to pay money.

Many of the acts of harassment were linked to the compensation the children's families received.

In some of the acts of violence, one child was pressed to jump from the fourth floor of a building. Another was threatened with a knife and was told that he or she has no right to live.

As a result, more than 60 percent of the children stopped disclosing they came from Fukushima.

Fukushima University specially appointed Professor Tamaki Honda, who has been advising evacuees, noted that the children are facing more hardship as time goes by. She called for the creation of a system that will watch over the children, who have lost a sense of community after fleeing their hometowns.

Lifting evacuation order in part of Namie and Tomokia

March 10, 2017

Govt. to lift more Fukushima evacuation orders

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20170310_09/

The Japanese government is set to lift evacuation orders in 2 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture, issued after the 2011 nuclear disaster.

The government will hold a joint meeting between the reconstruction taskforce and the nuclear disaster

task force on Friday. On Saturday, it will be 6 years since the earthquake and tsunami.

Participants will decide on whether to lift an evacuation order in part of Namie town on March 31st and a portion of Tomioka on April 1st.

Following the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, the government issued evacuation orders for 11 municipalities in the prefecture and has since gradually lifted them.

With the latest measure, the orders will be in effect only in no-entry zones with high radiation levels as well as part of the towns of Futaba and Okuma that co-host the nuclear plant.

About 1,150 square kilometers were initially subject to the government evacuation order. That number is now expected to shrink to about 369.

The central government hopes to continue decontamination work and infrastructure projects in some no-entry zones. It says it wants to create a hub for reconstruction by the end of fiscal 2021, where residents and decontamination workers will live.

But the government faces challenges in rebuilding communities as an increasing number of people, mainly the young, say they don't want to return to their hometowns even if evacuation orders are lifted.

Looks like a casino in the desert



The lights of 750 housing units for Tokyo Electric Power Co. employees shine in the foreground in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, as the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant glimmers in the back. (Yosuke Fukudome)



Lights in housing units for Tokyo Electric Power Co. staff seem brighter than normal in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, in February, a town co-hosting the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, as no residents are allowed to return to the town to live in yet. (Shigetaka Kodama)

March 10, 2017

SIX YEARS AFTER: TEPCO's 'casino in desert' looms in evacuated Fukushima town

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

March 10, 2017 at 18:30 JST

OKUMA, Fukushima Prefecture--As Kazutoshi Mabuchi drove down a mountain road here in the darkness, carefully avoiding a wild boar crossing his path, a cluster of orange-lit housing units suddenly came into view under the night sky.

These dwellings accommodate about 750 employees of Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, which Okuma co-hosts.

"It looks like a casino that popped up in the desert out of nowhere," said Mabuchi, 71, as he patrolled the town.

Mabuchi could see a cafeteria where some TEPCO employees were dining while watching TV.

All 11,000 residents of Okuma were forced to evacuate after the nuclear disaster unfolded at the plant, triggered by the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

The town has been almost entirely empty since, with 96 percent of it designated as a "difficult-to-return zone" due to the high radiation levels. That means it is unknown if and when the evacuees will ever be able to return to their former homes to live. Barricades are put up on the roads as well as in front of the houses in the zone to prevent entry.

The TEPCO housing units are located in Okuma's Ogawara district, which is excluded from the difficult-to-return zone. Classified as a restricted residence area due to relatively lower doses of radiation compared with most parts of the town, evacuees can visit Ogawara freely, but they cannot stay overnight.

Mabuchi is from Ogawara, and he, like all the other 360 people in the district, is still evacuated.

He drives four and a half hours each week to Okuma from Chiba Prefecture, where he moved to live with his daughter's family after the triple meltdown. He and two others work on a shift to patrol Okuma for three days, a task commissioned by the town government since the autumn of 2012.

Local officials hope to get the residence restriction designation for Osuma lifted by March 2019 by carrying out extensive decontamination operations there.

But it remains unclear whether evacuees will return even if the area's radiation readings drop enough to allow it to be habitable again.

A survey by the town shows that only one in three former residents is willing to return. The damaged roofs of the houses in the district remain covered with plastic sheets. Rice paddies and fields are strewn with numerous traces of holes dug up by wild boars.

Construction of the TEPCO housing units in Ogawara began in October 2015. The government granted a permit to the utility as a special case, saying the company is the "essential party in leading the recovery and rebuilding efforts" in Fukushima Prefecture.

The 750 single-person units were all occupied by the end of 2016 after TEPCO workers began moving in to them last July.

The utility says in its literature that the company "expects its employees residing there to contribute to rebuilding the town and reassurance of the people."

"In addition to our objective of grappling with the decommissioning process squarely, we wanted to make visible our determination to help the rebuilding of local communities," said Yoshiyuki Ishizaki, head of the company's Fukushima Revitalization Headquarters, about the housing project.

Many of the employees are shuttled by bus between the sprawling nuclear complex and their units, wearing the same uniform and eating the same food.

"It is like we are on a conveyer belt, and our houses are part of the plant," said one of the employees living there, referring to the absence of signs of a normal life, such as children playing on the ground and parents hurrying back home from their workplace.

There were more than 10 TEPCO dorms along the coastal area of Fukushima Prefecture before the nuclear disaster, which struck 40 years after the plant's first reactor went online.

Locals affectionately called the occupants of the dorms "Toden-san" (TEPCO-san) before the accident. TEPCO employees were active participants in local events, such as cleanup efforts on holidays, sports meets and festivals, to fit in with their host communities.

With the nuclear accident, however, that community life completely disappeared.

"I am not going to return to Ogawara to live," Mabuchi said while taking a break from the patrol.

He had his house razed in January. But he has carried on with the patrol for his neighbors' sake.

"I am hoping that the town will continue to exist just for the people who want to go back home," he said.

As the sky clouded over, the only lights visible in the dark came from the lights in the TEPCO lodgings.

"This is no longer Ogawara," he said, and slid into his car.

(This article was written by Takuya Ikeda and Chikako Kawahara.)

Local leaders have doubts about feasibility of recovery

March 10, 2017

40% of local leaders doubt 3.11 disaster area recovery by 2020 due to Fukushima crisis

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170310/p2a/00m/0na/007000c>

Many trucks are seen engaged in land redevelopment work in Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture, on March 9, 2017. (Mainichi)

About 40 percent of 42 local leaders along the coasts of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures doubt their areas will recover from the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake by the time of the 2020 Tokyo Games due to the ongoing Fukushima nuclear crisis, a Mainichi Shimbun survey shows.

A large majority of the pessimistic local chiefs represent cities, towns and villages in Fukushima Prefecture where many residents were forced to evacuate following the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. The survey results show that these municipalities have yet to recover from the meltdowns.

The central government has categorized a five-year period from fiscal 2011 as an intensive recovery period, and another five-year period from fiscal 2016 as a recovery and building period. It plans to spend as much as 32 trillion yen over a 10-year period ending in fiscal 2020 to complete recovery operations and abolish the Reconstruction Agency. It aims to support Fukushima and other disaster-stricken prefectures, but has no clear budget provision.

The Mainichi Shimbun received written responses from all 12 city, town and village mayors it queried in Iwate Prefecture, and from all 15 mayors queried in each of Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures.

While only two municipal chiefs in Iwate and one in Miyagi did not anticipate an end to recovery efforts by fiscal 2020, 13 local leaders in Fukushima Prefecture -- including those in evacuation zones -- shared this view. Only the Shinchi town mayor replied that recovery will be possible by fiscal 2020, while the mayor of Soma said he did not know.

Many local leaders in Fukushima Prefecture say they do not expect recovery operations to be completed by fiscal 2020 due to negative effects from the nuclear disaster. The town of Namie says it does not anticipate an end to recovery operations in three years, pointing out that the recovery speeds in areas hit by tsunami versus the nuclear disaster are obviously different.

The town of Futaba, 96 percent of which is designated as a difficult-to-return zone, says post-disaster restoration has not even started. Kawauchi village, which has already seen its evacuation order lifted, laments that its population is set to drop drastically due to a very low birthrate and a rapidly aging citizenry.

Rikuzentakata and Otsuchi in Iwate, and Yamamoto in Miyagi, responded that they are unlikely to witness a full recovery by fiscal 2020. Rikuzentakata explained that its new city hall isn't scheduled to be completed until fiscal 2021. The town of Otsuchi cited a delay in a land redevelopment project and other reasons. The town of Yamamoto said that community formation at mass relocation sites and psychological recovery take a long time.

Hearing the voices

March 10, 2017

Editorial: Hearing the voices of victims, 6 years from the Great East Japan Earthquake

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170310/p2a/00m/0na/022000c>

March 11 marks the sixth anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami, and outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, in which nearly 20,000 people were killed or went missing.

- **【Related】** 40% of local leaders doubt 3.11 disaster area recovery by 2020 due to Fukushima crisis
- **【Related】** Fukushima laden with piles of radioactive soil that can't be moved into storage
- **【Related】** Bullied Fukushima evacuee releases new note for disaster's 6th anniversary

The hardest-hit areas are still rebuilding. In particular, for Fukushima Prefecture, home to the stricken Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, the disaster and hardships are ongoing.

The population of Fukushima Prefecture, which stood at 2.02 million before the triple disasters of 2011, has dipped below 1.9 million. There remain almost 80,000 evacuees spread across Japan's 47 prefectures. Six years after it began, we are still experiencing the tragedy of a nuclear disaster.

In the past year, the gravity of the disaster victims' predicament became painfully clear in the incidence of evacuee children from Fukushima being bullied in other prefectures.

One of the first cases that drew public attention was that of a first year junior high school boy, who had evacuated voluntarily from Fukushima Prefecture to Yokohama. He was called and treated as a "germ" in elementary school, and was forced to fork over a total of 1.5 million yen to his classmates.

"I thought many times that I wanted to die. But a lot of people died in the earthquake disaster, so I decided to live," the student wrote.

So what was behind the bullying?

Kei Hida, an attorney who keeps in contact with the student, says, "School is a microcosm of society. Children watch what adults do, and prey on those weaker than themselves."

The student and his family had been victims of harassment shortly after evacuating to Yokohama. They would find trash thrown onto their car, which had a Fukushima Prefecture license plate. They received notes in their mailbox that read, "Get out, Fukushima prefectural residents."

Once the Yokohama incident became public, a series of similar evacuee bullying cases came to light across Japan.

In Chiba Prefecture, at least one evacuee child was taunted by classmates who said, "Here comes radiation!" In Niigata Prefecture, a teacher attached the word "germ" to the name of an evacuee boy.

As of May 2016, approximately 7,800 students from Fukushima Prefecture were still evacuated across the country. It is possible that more cases of bullying have yet to be exposed.

According to attorneys who offer support to evacuees from Fukushima Prefecture, many hide where they are from to avoid discrimination or harassment. These people have not only lost their hometowns to the nuclear disaster, but suffer a second victimization in the places they have evacuated to, through discrimination and bullying. It is irrational to subject these people to such treatment.

Meanwhile, a major change in public assistance for Fukushima nuclear disaster victims is coming up. This month, a program that provides homes free of charge to people who have evacuated -- carried out by the Fukushima Prefectural Government through host municipal governments -- is set to end. The purpose of the measure is said to be to urge evacuees to return to their hometowns in Fukushima Prefecture.

However, Daisaku Seto, the secretary-general of the Cooperation Center for 3.11, an organization that provides assistance to voluntary evacuees, says his cell phone has been ringing off the hook since last month with calls from evacuees who do not have a place to live come the end of March.

The free housing program applies to voluntary evacuees, as opposed to Fukushima Prefecture residents under government evacuation orders. According to the Fukushima Prefectural Government, that comes out to approximately 26,600 people, or one-third of Fukushima evacuees.

Unlike evacuees whose homes are in no-go zones, voluntary evacuees are not eligible for regular compensation payments from Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), and free housing was the main pillar of the public assistance they could get. But in June 2015, the Fukushima Prefectural Government decided it would stop the free housing program, citing improving living conditions in Fukushima Prefecture as a result of decontamination efforts. Many evacuees have decided to stay where they are, however, as they have grown accustomed to their new jobs or schools. Kaori Kawai, 35, who along with her two children evacuated voluntarily from Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, to the Saitama Prefecture town of Moroyama, decided to stay in Moroyama because her children had established their school lives there. Since free housing was a significant help to her family in a time of great need, Kawai was shocked by the announcement that the free housing program would be terminated.

Single-parent households like Kawai's are not uncommon among Fukushima evacuees, nor are families forced to maintain two homes. It is crucial that measures addressing evacuees' needs be implemented. After Fukushima Prefecture concludes the free housing program, some municipal governments will maintain it with their own budgets, or otherwise support evacuees by giving them priority when housing - - albeit not for free -- is available. This means, however, that the type and extent of assistance evacuees can receive will differ greatly based on the municipality to which they have evacuated. Under such circumstances, the central government should be taking the initiative to coordinate assistance efforts. Meanwhile, there have been new developments in areas designated as no-go zones by the central government.

Evacuation orders issued for the Fukushima Prefecture village of Iitate and town of Namie, as well as some other municipalities, are to be lifted soon, with the exception of areas designated "difficult-to-return" zones. The lifting of the order will apply to at least 30,000 people. However, only about 10 percent of people from areas where evacuation orders have already been lifted have returned to their hometowns. The evacuation order issued for Odaka Ward in the Fukushima prefectural city of Minamisoma was lifted in July 2016, ahead of the rest of the city. But the area remains sparsely populated, and there are many dilapidated homes left untouched since their occupants evacuated. The people there say that only the elderly return, and there's an urgent need to rebuild and protect the lives and health of those who make that choice.

Yet, the community is slowly rebuilding. In Odaka Ward, elementary, junior high and senior high schools will reopen in April.

With our sights set on future community building, we must tackle the issue of maintaining ties between those who choose to live in Fukushima Prefecture and those who stay where they've evacuated. Yuko Hirohata, a longtime resident of Odaka, issues a newsletter every month about the people who work in the

ward, and sends it to evacuees living outside the prefecture. She says she does it out of a desire to keep people updated on how Odaka is doing.

Among the people of Fukushima Prefecture are those who have already returned, those who will return in the future, and those who will never return. If it hadn't been for the nuclear disaster, these people would all be living in their hometowns. What's being called into question now is how we, as well as the central and local governments, will listen and respond to the voices of these people.

Far from back to normal

March 10, 2017

Six years after the 3/11 disasters

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2017/03/10/editorials/six-years-311-disasters/#.WMLcJ_KISos

Life remains far from back to normal for tens of thousands of people displaced by the March 11, 2011, disasters that hit the Pacific coastline of northeastern Honshu. That as many as 36,000 people in Miyagi, Iwate and Fukushima prefectures are still living in prefabricated temporary housing units six years later says a lot about the difficulties that are hindering the reconstruction of lives shattered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and the massive tsunami that swept the Tohoku coastal areas, as well as the meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant that forced residents out of their hometowns. The government must keep extending the maximum support that these people need.

Six years after the mega-quake and tsunami left more than 18,000 people dead or missing, about 123,000 people remain displaced from their hometowns, living in temporary housing units, rented apartments or relatives' and friends' homes across the country. Many are believed to have given up hope of returning and have started new lives where they ended up. The figure is down from 174,000 a year ago, and is roughly a quarter of the estimated peak of 470,000 right after the disasters. But nearly 80,000 people from Fukushima Prefecture alone remain away from their homes after they were either ordered to flee from the radioactive fallout from the Tepco plant disaster or voluntarily evacuated out of fears of radioactive contamination of their native communities.

Restoration of infrastructure damaged by the tsunami has seen steady progress. According to the agriculture ministry, 96 percent of farmland in Miyagi and 77 percent in Iwate that had been flooded with seawater has been restored to arable conditions, while the ratio still stands at 46 percent in Fukushima since farms around the wrecked nuclear plant remain off-limits. The fisheries output at key ports in the three prefectures has recovered to 70 percent of the pre-2011 levels. More than 90 percent of the damaged railway services and roads have been restored.

But reconstruction of people's lives disrupted by the disasters continues to be slow and uneven. Of the 53,000 "temporary" units for evacuees set up in the three most heavily affected prefectures, 45,000 — more than 80 percent of the total — are still standing. The number of residents in such units had fallen to 35,503 as of the end of January — about 30 percent of the peak — as many of the occupants vacated when they rebuilt their homes or moved to public apartments for the surviving disaster victims. But with nearly half of the temporary units now vacant, the residents who remain are losing the sense of community they once had and face the risk of isolation.

Following the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake, which killed more than 6,000 people in Kobe and its environs, all temporary units for evacuees were vacated within five years. Of the 51 municipalities in the three Tohoku prefectures that built the temporary units for evacuees, only 11 have managed so far to tear down all of their units — meaning that all evacuees were able to move on to new accommodations. In some municipalities, many of them in Fukushima where the nuclear-based evacuation has become protracted, it is unclear when all the temporary units will be dismantled.

Tepco continues to struggle in its efforts to clean up the mess from the three meltdowns at Fukushima No. 1, which lost emergency power to cool the reactors after it was flooded by the giant tsunami. Work to dismantle the crippled plant is estimated to take decades, as the massive radiation levels — which were estimated at 650 sieverts per hour inside the primary containment vessel of its No. 2 reactor in a recent robot probe — clouds the prospect of removing the melted nuclear fuel.

The government meanwhile has been moving to lift evacuation orders in areas around the plant where decontamination efforts and reconstruction of public infrastructure are deemed to have progressed. It plans to allow the return of residents to four Fukushima municipalities — Iidate and Kawamata and parts of Namie and Tomioka — at the end of the month. Areas off-limit to residents will then be reduced to roughly 30 percent of the peak.

The upcoming move will pave the way for the return of up to 32,000 residents to these municipalities. However, it is not clear how many of them will actually return — as many of the former residents, particularly the younger generation — are reportedly concerned about life back in the hometowns where infrastructure related to their daily lives, such as shopping, education and medical services, may not have been restored. Kyodo News has reported that in Fukushima municipalities where the evacuation orders have been lifted since 2014, only an average of 13 percent of their former residents have returned. In a Reconstruction Agency survey, more than 50 percent of the former residents of Namie and Tomioka said they have decided not to return if the evacuation order is lifted, with the ratio of such respondents rising to 70 percent among the younger generation up to their 30s.

Six years on, efforts to rebuild the shattered lives are largely unfinished. And that should be the government's policy priority going forward.

Many evacuees have died in temporary houses

March 11, 2017

1,436 evacuees have died in temporary housing since 2011 earthquake

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170311/p2a/00m/0na/025000c>

At least 1,436 evacuees from the Great East Japan Earthquake and Fukushima nuclear disaster have died while living in temporary housing units during the past six years, it has been learned from a questionnaire given to municipal governments.

- **【Related】** Over 120,000 evacuees remain 6 years after Great East Japan Earthquake
- **【Related】** Japan perseveres on 6-year anniversary of quake, nuclear disaster
- **【Related】** In Photos: Japan marks 6 years since Great East Japan Earthquake

In January and February this year, the Mainichi Shimbun sent questionnaires to 42 coastal municipalities in the three prefectures hit heaviest by the disasters, asking for the number of people who had died while living in temporary housing units, and received answers totaling to 1,436. By prefecture, there were 312 deaths in Iwate, 444 in Miyagi and 680 in Fukushima. Six municipalities -- Otsuchi and Miyako in Iwate Prefecture, Kesenuma and Higashimatsushima in Miyagi Prefecture, and Kawamata and Kawauchi in Fukushima Prefecture -- did not have statistics.

In addition to people who died in the hospital, the numbers include people who died in temporary housing and people who died alone. According to the National Police Agency, 230 evacuees in temporary housing units have died alone in these three prefectures.

Temporary housing units are expected to continue to be in use until fiscal 2020, when the national government plans to mostly wrap up its programs for reconstruction from the disasters. Around 53,000 temporary housing units were constructed since soon after the March 2011 disasters, and the number of evacuees living in the structures peaked at 116,615.

After the Great Hanshin Earthquake of 1995, around 48,000 temporary housing units were built, and five years later, in January 2000, they stopped being used. It is said that 233 people died alone in these structures, but it is not known how many people died in total while living in the temporary housing units. When asked when they expect to no longer have evacuees in temporary housing, the latest date given among those who offered a timeframe was the city of Ofunato, Iwate Prefecture, at "fiscal 2020." The next longest were the towns of Yamada and Otsuchi, at March 2020, followed by the town of Onagawa, Miyagi Prefecture, at January 2020. All cited delays in the preparation of land for reconstruction housing and the construction of that housing as reasons for the late dates. Six municipalities -- Rikuzentakata in Iwate Prefecture and Namie, Okuma, Iitate, Kawamata and Futaba in Fukushima Prefecture -- said they don't know when they might no longer be using temporary housing for evacuees.

Taku Sugano, director at the Sendai-based organization Personal Support Center, which works to help evacuees in temporary housing rebuild their lives, says, "Together with speeding up the construction of reconstruction housing, a support system is needed that can be used to find out what is stopping each evacuee from moving to their next residence, and to help them with things like receiving livelihood protection payments."

6 years

March 11, 2017

Japan marks 6 years since 3/11 disaster

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20170311_03/

Saturday marks 6 years since the massive earthquake and tsunami hit northeastern Japan, triggering the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident.

Reconstruction efforts in disaster-hit areas have been delayed, and over 120,000 people are still living in temporary and other housing as evacuees.

The magnitude-9.0 quake struck in the Pacific off the coast of northeastern Japan at around 2:46 PM on March 11th, 2011. It generated a tsunami more than 10 meters high. Areas around the quake's focal zone

still experience tremors more frequently than before the disaster.

The National Police Agency says that, as of Friday, the number of deaths stands at 15,893 in 12 prefectures. It says 2,553 remain missing in 6 prefectures.

The Reconstruction Agency says at least 3,523 people died in 10 prefectures due to health problems and other reasons related to their lives as evacuees.

The agency adds that as of February 13th, more than 123,000 people were living in temporary, rental, or other housing as evacuees.

The agency says 23,393 housing units for disaster survivors who cannot afford to rebuild their homes had been completed by the end of January. That's 78 percent of over 30,000 such units the authorities plan to build.

The Japanese government will lift evacuation orders for many areas in Fukushima Prefecture by early April, except for no-entry zones with high radiation levels. But many residents say they won't return home due to concern over radiation and delays in rebuilding infrastructure.

NHK has learned, based on a national census, that the population in 14 coastal municipalities in the prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima decreased by more than 10 percent over the period between March 1, 2011, and February 1 of this year.

3 reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant suffered meltdowns following the earthquake and tsunami.

The operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO, is trying to figure out a way to remove fuel debris, a mixture of molten fuel and reactor parts. The removal work is regarded as the toughest task in the process of decommissioning the reactors.

But high radiation levels make it difficult to determine the exact location of the debris.

In February, the utility sent a robot into the containment vessel of the plant's No.2 reactor and detected an extremely high radiation level of 210 sieverts per hour.

The robot could not reach a central area under the reactor's core, failing to confirm facts about the fuel debris.

TEPCO plans to conduct a robotic survey inside the No.1 reactor, starting on March 14th.

The utility is also tackling the problem of radioactive water at the plant.

The utility has finished 98 percent of the work to freeze soil around the No.1 to No.4 reactor buildings to block the inflow of groundwater.

Nearly 940,000 tons of contaminated water are stored in about 900 tanks at the plant. No substantive plans have been made to dispose of the water.

Welcomed by wild boars

March 11, 2017

Wild boars offer challenge for homecomers in radiation-hit Fukushima

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201703110036.html>

REUTERS

NAMIE, Fukushima Prefecture--Beyond radiation risks, an unexpected nuisance looms for Japanese returning to towns vacated after the Fukushima nuclear crisis six years ago--wild boars.

Hundreds of the animals, which have been known to attack people when enraged, descended from surrounding hills and forests into towns left deserted after the 2011 disaster.

Now they roam the empty streets and overgrown backyards of Japan's deserted seaside town of Namie, foraging for food.

"It is not really clear now which is the master of the town, people or wild boars," said Tamotsu Baba, mayor of the town, which has been partially cleared for people to return home freely at the end of the month.

"If we don't get rid of them and turn this into a human-led town, the situation will get even wilder and uninhabitable."

At the end of March, Japan is set to lift evacuation orders for parts of Namie, located just 4 km from the wrecked nuclear plant, as well as three other towns.

Residents fled to escape radiation spewed by the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, whose reactors went into meltdown after it was struck by an earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

In the nearby town of Tomioka, hunter Shoichiro Sakamoto leads a team of 13 assigned to catch and kill the wild boars with air rifles. Twice a week, they set about 30 cage traps, using rice flour as bait.

"After people left, they began coming down from the mountains and now they are not going back," he said.

"They found a place that was comfortable. There was plenty of food and no one to come after them."

Since last April, the squad has captured about 300 of the animals, and intends to keep up its work even after the evacuation orders are scrapped, Sakamoto added.

More than half of Namie's former 21,500 residents have decided not to return, however, a government survey showed last year, citing concerns over radiation and the safety of the nuclear plant, which is being decommissioned.

But at town meetings earlier this year to prepare for the homecoming, residents had voiced worries about the wild boars.

"I'm sure officials at all levels are giving some thought to this," said Hidezo Sato, a former seed merchant in Namie. "Something must be done."

see also : <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/03/12/national/wild-boars-pose-fresh-challenge-returnees-radiation-hit-fukushima-towns/>

Miracle tree



March 11, 2017

SIX YEARS AFTER: Iwate's lonely 'miracle pine tree' to get some new neighbors

By SHINGO KUZUTANI/ Staff Writer

An aerial view of coastal Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture, where the preserved “miracle pine tree” and devastated youth hostel stand (Video by Kazuhiro Nagashima and Shingo Kuzutani)

RIKUZENTAKATA, Iwate Prefecture--A vast pine forest that had all but one tree swept away by the 2011 tsunami is on the road to recovery.

The sole tree that managed to survive when about 70,000 other pines were wiped out was dubbed the “miracle pine tree” in the Takata Matsubara forest.

The pine eventually died due to being effectively poisoned by seawater, but a carbon rod was inserted into its core, parts of it were chemically preserved and the reinforced memorial tree was erected back into place in June 2013.

About 1,250 pine saplings will also be planted in the area, allowing the city of Rikuzentakata to take another step toward reconstruction.

In January, a 12.5-meter-high seawall spanning 2 kilometers along the coast was largely completed.

Construction to build a memorial park nearby is set to begin soon, which will become home to a facility dedicated to victims of the devastation triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

The remnants of a youth hostel in the area that was destroyed in the tsunami will also be preserved to remind visitors of the disaster.

Six years and still struggling

March 11, 2017

Many still struggling 6 years after quake, nuclear disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170311/p2g/00m/0dm/021000c>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Survivors pledged to reconstruct their hometowns Saturday on the sixth anniversary of the 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disasters in northeastern Japan, with many still struggling to rebuild their lives.

"I never imagined I would be living in temporary housing for six years," said Hirotohi Masukura, a 61-year-old evacuee from an off-limits area near the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, where radioactive decontamination work could take decades.

Although the evacuation order will be lifted in part of his hometown of Namie in Fukushima Prefecture at the end of this month, Masukura has decided not to return due to illness.

"I won't be able to return even if I wish to do so. I want an environment in which I can live with peace of mind," he said at a shelter in the city of Fukushima.

In Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture, a 62-year-old female nurse was among a group of people praying in light snowfall at a monument dedicated to the disaster victims.

She said her elder brother, a police officer, died while guiding residents from the tsunami. "I'm proud of my elder brother, who fulfilled his duty. But I want him to come back."

As of Feb. 13, 123,168 people remained displaced from Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima, the three hardest-hit prefectures. Initially, 470,000 people fled in the wake of the disasters.

A government-sponsored memorial service was held at the National Theater in Tokyo, with a moment of silence observed at 2:46 p.m., when the magnitude-9.0 quake struck on March 11, 2011.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said in his address that reconstruction in the affected regions has "reached a new stage," citing restoration of infrastructure and the lifting of evacuation orders in Fukushima, which was hit by the world's worst nuclear disaster since the 1986 Chernobyl crisis.

"I would like to make a firm pledge here that the government will exert its united efforts to build a strong and resilient nation that is resistant to disasters," the prime minister said.

With the decommissioning of the six-reactor Fukushima Daiichi complex expected to take up to 40 years, 39,598 former residents remain outside the prefecture.

Representing people who lost their family members in the disasters, Yoshinobu Ishii, a 72-year-old resident of Kawauchi in Fukushima, said in a message that his village is far from what it used to be as younger people have not come back due to concern about their children's education.

"I consider it to be our responsibility to gather our strength to promote the reconstruction and recovery of our community," he said.

Prince Akishino said his "heart aches deeply" when he thinks about those who are unable to return to their homes due to high levels of radiation.

"It is the hope of us all that each and every one of those who are in a difficult situation will not be forgotten or left behind and the day will come when they will once again live in peace and quiet."

Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, who were not present at this year's memorial service having attended since 2012, offered a moment of silence at their residence, according to the Imperial Household Agency.

Police, the Japan Coast Guard and volunteers conducted search operations Saturday for the remains of people still listed as missing along the coasts of the three prefectures.

The disasters left 15,893 people dead and 2,553 unaccounted for, according to the latest tally released by the National Police Agency.

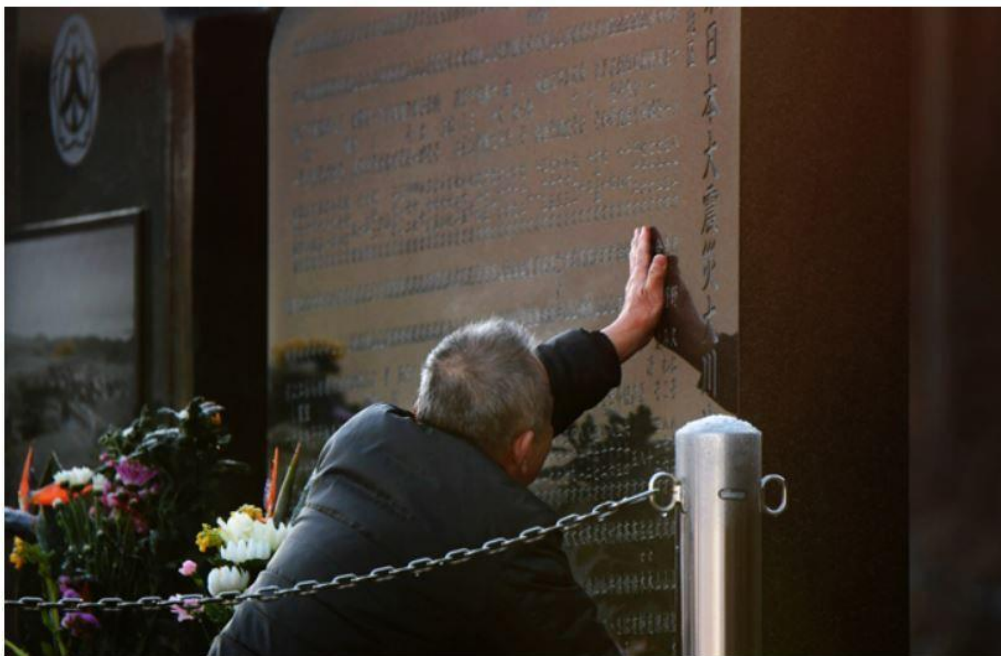
Survivors remain vulnerable to physical and mental health problems. In the three prefectures, 3,523 people have died from causes linked to the disasters, including illness and suicide.

Abe's government and utilities are seeking to restart nuclear plants shut down following the disaster. Currently, three of Japan's 45 commercial nuclear reactors are operating.

Recent reports about the bullying of children displaced from Fukushima have also captured national attention, prompting the education ministry to launch a nationwide survey to investigate the issue.

SIX YEARS AFTER: 34,000 people in Tohoku region still in makeshift housing units

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN



A man touches the name of his grandchild etched in a monument to victims of the 2011 tsunami in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, on March 11. He lost three grandchildren, including one who attended Okawa Elementary School in the city. Eighty-four pupils, teachers and school staff perished in the tsunami while fleeing from the school. (Tetsuro Takehana)

As March 11 dawned, some 34,000 residents fell into this category, and many have no hope of returning to their former homes as the tsunami spawned by the Great East Japan Earthquake devastated vast coastal areas of northeastern Japan.

Efforts, meantime, are continuing to develop residential land and provide public housing for the victims. By the end of this month, 69 percent of the development of residential land on elevated ground as well as inland is expected to be completed in the three hardest-hit prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima. With regard to public housing, 83 percent of the units will be finished.

The death toll from the 2011 disaster now officially stands at 15,893 with 2,553 people unaccounted for. Deaths attributed indirectly to the disaster come to 3,523.

The triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, triggered by the magnitude-9.0 quake and towering tsunami, forced about 56,000 people in communities around the plant to flee under directions from the government.

* * *

March 11, 2017

Over 120,000 evacuees remain 6 years after Great East Japan Earthquake

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170311/p2a/00m/0na/013000c>

More than 120,000 people remain in evacuation following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Fukushima nuclear disaster, even after the passage of six years.

- **【Related】** Japan perseveres on 6-year anniversary of quake, nuclear disaster
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According to statistics released on March 10 by the National Police Agency, there were 15,893 deaths from the Great East Japan Earthquake and 2,553 people still unaccounted for, making it the worst natural disaster to hit Japan in the post-World War II period. Additionally, as of the end of September 2016, there had been 3,523 deaths indirectly caused by the disaster, such as falling ill during evacuation, an increase of 116 people compared to the previous year. Among these deaths, 2,086 were of Fukushima Prefecture residents, more than the number of residents from that prefecture who died directly from the disaster. The number of disaster evacuees counted by the Reconstruction Agency has fallen from its peak of around 347,000 in June 2012 to about one-third of this amount at 123,168 as of February this year. Of them, 79,226 are evacuees who hail from Fukushima Prefecture. According to Jan. 1 statistics by Kyodo News, the number of people living in reconstruction housing in the three hardest-hit prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima was 39,664, more than the number living in temporary evacuee housing, which is about 34,000.

Evacuation orders that were issued by the national government for 11 Fukushima municipalities have been lifted or are planned to be lifted in nine of those municipalities. The other two municipalities, the towns of Okuma and Futaba, remain completely under evacuation orders. The area of land under evacuation orders has fallen to around 30 percent of what it originally was, but only about 8 percent of those who had lived in areas with their evacuation orders lifted are expected to return.

Due to delays in the building of reconstruction housing and the preparation of land for it and other permanent housing, and due to the effects of the nuclear disaster, people are expected to further remain in evacuation. In Fukushima Prefecture, free housing for people who evacuated from areas outside of those under evacuation orders will expire as of the end of March.

The cardboard bed invention

March 11, 2016

Inventor of cardboard bed hopes to end need for evacuees to sleep on floor

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170311/p2a/00m/0na/002000c>

YAO, Osaka -- After the Great East Japan Earthquake, Yoshihiro Mizutani, the president of a cardboard company here, invented a "cardboard bed" so disaster victims wouldn't have to sleep huddled on the floors of evacuation centers.

Mizutani, 46, has now formed contracts with over 250 local governments to provide the beds to evacuation centers in the event of a disaster. In the meantime, he has continued to make improvements to the product, which is easy to transport and set up.

The J Packs Co. president wanted to do "something useful for society" with the cardboard business founded by his grandfather that he had inherited. Seeing disaster victims sleeping huddled together on the floor of evacuation shelters on television following the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, he found his answer. To provide aid in a situation where the cold was threatening many people's health, he came up with the solution of having evacuees sleep on cardboard boxes to keep warm.

The bed consists of 12 boxes and a top panel also made of cardboard. After releasing a prototype of his design on Twitter, there was an immediate response from doctors in the affected areas. However, when Mizutani actually visited evacuation centers, he was repeatedly rejected, being told that there was "no precedent" for the bed. In the end, he was only able to distribute roughly 2,800 units.

Despite the initial lackluster response, Mizutani pressed on, and the beds were used in evacuation shelters following the landslides on Izu Oshima, an island south of Tokyo, in 2013 and in Hiroshima in 2014. Praise for the beds being "sanitary," "sturdy and long-lasting" as well as "light and easy to move" steadily spread. In the areas affected by the April 2016 Kumamoto earthquake disaster, 5,300 of the beds were distributed. Still, Mizutani is not completely satisfied with his invention. "There are still problems to be solved, such as how to make the units more compact," he said. This past January, at an evacuation center seminar in Kitami, Hokkaido, Mizutani unveiled a new version of the bed that did not require packing tape for assembly.

The evacuation centers using the cardboard beds told Mizutani that there were few disaster-related deaths of evacuees. "They said that evacuees felt they 'returned to a humanlike lifestyle' and regained their energy. That makes me happy," he said. Mizutani's goal is to reduce the number of evacuees who have to sleep on cold floors to zero.

Namie: What future?

March 11, 2017

Namie: one step forward, a few steps back

Home holds little appeal for Namie evacuees

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/03/11/national/social-issues/namie-one-step-forward-steps-back/#.WMPqLvKISos>

by John L. Tran

Special To The Japan Times

“Shayo” (“Setting Sun”) is a somber, somewhat ominous photographic image created in 1914 by Hidaka Chotaro (1883-1926). It is a sepia-toned picture of a small hamlet over which loom dark mountains and the oncoming night.

A member of the amateur Nagoya-based Ai-yu Photography Club, Chotaro sought out isolated mountain and coastal landscapes to create pictorial images of traditional life in response to a question that has troubled Japan since the country started on the road of industrialization: Can its rural communities survive, culturally and economically, in the modern world?

Chotaro’s style was part of a worldwide trend of creating photographic prints that resembled Victorian-era oil paintings and, as a result, was commonly used to romanticize nature and oppose modernity with nostalgia for a mythical past. “Shayo,” whose title alludes to a more metaphorical decline, may not be a ground-breaking work of art in itself, but it has historical value as a representation of the anxieties of its time.

More than 100 years later, the issue of rural depopulation is more serious than ever and probably nowhere is this problem more acute than in the area around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The reason for empty houses, shops and businesses may on the surface seem to be obvious — and qualitatively different from what is causing the decline in other parts of Japan — but it’s not just concern about radioactivity.

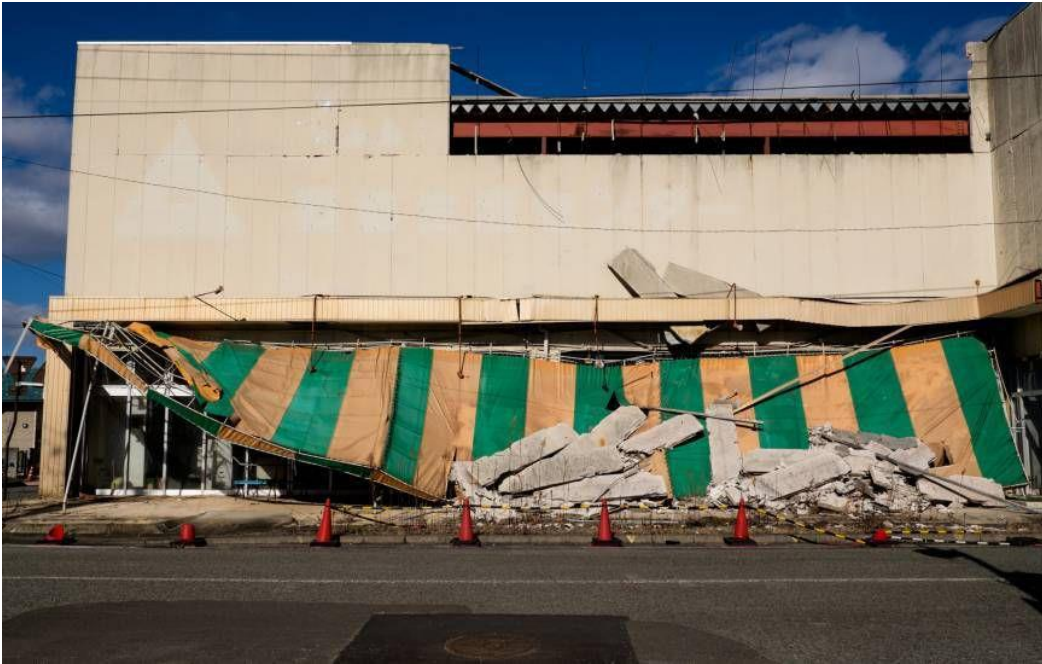
From April this year, parts of Namie, a region that was heavily contaminated by radiation from the meltdowns at the plant caused by the earthquake and tsunami that struck Tohoku on March 11, 2011, will be open for residents to reoccupy permanently, but far fewer people are taking up the offer than local and central governments would like. **In a September 2016 poll, only 17.5 percent of evacuees responded that they intended to return to where they lived before the disaster.**

A retired head teacher from the local primary school who is now head of one of the local residents’ committees is fairly sanguine about radioactivity.

“I’m not worried about radiation,” he says as he visits his property in the evacuated zone to till one of his fields, “but a lot of people are afraid to move back. They’re more scared of crime.”

Although he admits he has no justification for it, he presumes that a lot of the burglary has been perpetrated “by foreigners.” Other concerns are the damage to property from vermin and other wildlife, and the dread of being constantly faced with traumatic memories and the thought of lost loved ones.

The government is wasting huge amounts of money decontaminating areas for habitation when no one wants to move back, he says.



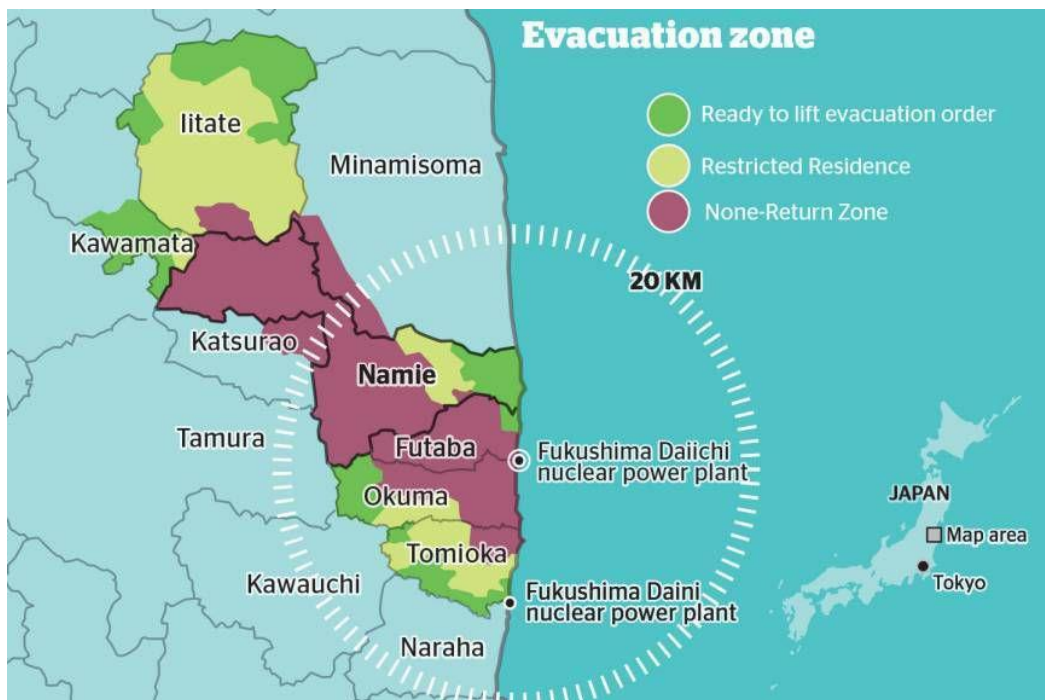
Shinichi Kaneyama, head of Namie's reconstruction effort, shares this point of view. Speaking in an empty town hall located at one end of Namie's deserted main street in January, Kaneyama expresses doubt that the main objective of reconstruction should be to sanitize areas in the expectation that evacuees would want to return to their homes.

"We don't have concrete plans on how to revitalize the area. It's something we're working on now," Kaneyama says, somewhat nervously.

"I used to love fishing around here when I was a kid," he says. "Fishing was important for the area generally and I wish we could revive that ... but, with the water carrying radiation down from the mountains, I don't know if that's possible."

Along with the local police, construction workers and radiation screening facility staff who work in the area and live nearby, Kaneyama is confident that he is not at risk from radiation, and that the reason many people don't want to move back is not knowing how they'd make a living.

A scant 39 businesses, of a pre-3/11 total of around 1,000, are listed as being open in the area, according to the 2017 Namie Reconstruction Report. This dearth of amenities and job opportunities forms part of a vicious circle — there is nothing to return to, because few people are coming back.



There is radiation as well, of course. The Environment Ministry map of Fukushima shows a red smear running northwest from the crippled nuclear plant. The Namie district is divided into three zones: A, B and C. Zone A, closest to the coast, is the one that is scheduled to be fully open from April. Zone B has an annual accumulated radioactivity reading of 20-50 millisieverts. As the safe limit for exposure to radiation was set after 3/11, not without controversy, at 20 mSv by the government, it is open for people to drive through and for property owners to check on their homes and buildings, but not deemed sufficiently decontaminated for re-population.

The area northwest of the plant, Zone C, which lay directly under the plume of radiation from the venting of containment vessels, is described elliptically in the Namie Reconstruction Report as having an annual reading of "50 mSv or more." Entry into this area, which constitutes 81 percent of the district, is strictly forbidden, and Zone C is considered too large to decontaminate in the foreseeable future.

Differences between how this situation is presented in the local council's Namie Reconstruction Report and how it is couched by the Environment Ministry and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) are understandable, but telling nonetheless.

Decontamination is a priority for all three organizations, but Namie officials also view health care, education, housing and transport as issues that must be resolved. By comparison, the metrics of success for the Environment Ministry are the number of hectares decontaminated and the volume of radioactive soil put into interim storage.

METI's goals are defined in terms of returning people to their homes as quickly as possible, monitoring water quality and providing financial compensation to disaster victims. If you have any doubts that the central government may have been lacking in competency or transparency in its handling of the 3/11 nuclear crisis, do not watch their clumsy Orwellian video "Fukushima Today — For a Bright Future."

Noboru Takano used to run a construction business in Namie and now lives with his wife in temporary housing in Minamisoma. Takano doesn't see a future in going back. He's retired but does the odd contract job, as well as being head of a local residents' committee.

Speaking in a small community center in Minamisoma, Takano says that although people are gradually moving out of the temporary housing, they are not returning to Namie, and are instead choosing to live elsewhere. Like Kaneyama, Takano thinks that **Namie is being cleaned up and new housing is being built because people get paid to do it, not because anybody is keen to move back.**

“For older people there’s nowhere convenient to shop. ... You’d need to drive a long way just to get groceries,” Takano says. “There’s nothing I want to go back to. For younger people, I’m worried that they have no opportunities.

Takano is both jovial and stoic when talking about his hometown and his present situation. He’s reasonably comfortable and doesn’t want to dwell on the past.

Not everyone has fared as well. Out of a total pre-March 2011 disaster population of 21,434, 399 Namie residents have died from “evacuation stress,” as it is called in the Reconstruction Report — more than double the number of people who were killed by the earthquake and tsunami.

Kenji Kubota, a curator who founded Japan Art Donation to raise funds for artists to get involved with disaster relief within days of 3/11, understood very early that mental health would be a major issue and that people, not just structures, would also need rebuilding.

Kubota later worked with the University of Tsukuba on the Creative Reconstruction Project, in which a number of different art and design schemes were developed to provide emotional support for evacuees living in temporary housing.

A particularly acute problem, he noticed, was the uncertainty of not knowing how long the limbo of being displaced would last. He also wanted to show how disaster victims felt that they were being forgotten and that their concerns were not being heard.

One of the main outcomes from the array of art and design workshops and community activities that resulted from the project was the creation of a documentary film titled “Iwaki Note: Fukushima Voice.” Essentially a student project, the documentary is a little rough around the edges and doesn’t have a strongly constructed central narrative, something that professional filmmakers might have worked harder to create. It is, however, a more subtle and powerful piece of work as a result. Rather than providing viewers with an emotionally cathartic story of human triumph over adversity, it portrays people who have individual and complex identities, over and above being victims of a disaster, struggling together to find solutions to their problems.

How useful can art and design projects be in helping to alleviate the effects of natural — and not-so-natural — disasters? Where large projects funded by public money are concerned, there will always be questions about cost-effectiveness, especially since it’s hard — and perhaps counterproductive — to measure success when it comes to matters of creative practice.

Chiba-based freelance designer Seiji Tarumi does have two stories that are fairly convincing, however. Working with independent collective Tsumugiya, he designed fashion accessories with the surplus materials of deer horn and fishing line. The aim was to provide an occupation for oyster farmers’ wives in Makinohama near Ishinomaki after the tsunami destroyed the local oyster beds.

One woman, who had lost everything in the disaster and was suicidal with depression, wrote to Tsumugiya after joining the jewelry workshop to say that the opportunity to get together with other oyster farmers’ wives and do something productive gave her a reason to smile and laugh for the first time since 3/11.

More recently Tarumi has been working with the Door to Asia designer-in-residence program, and designed packaging for an apple grower and winemaker based in Ofunato, Iwate Prefecture.

The client had moved back to his hometown in the wake of 3/11 after living for a time in Tokyo. He had wanted to start a business that could revitalize the area but was having trouble promoting his brand.

Tarumi put his client's story in the packaging and gave the brand a fresh new look, which has helped it become a premium product in department stores and lifestyle shops nationwide.

One of the clearest examples of clever design being of direct practical use can be found in the city of Kamaishi, located a few kilometers up the coast from Ofunato.

Robin Jenkins, a senior lecturer in interior and spatial design at Chelsea College of Arts in London, worked in collaboration with nonprofit organization Future Lab Tohoku to devise the Lifeboat in a Box project. To keep costs and red tape to a minimum, a "lifeboat station" was designed to go in the container in which the U.K.-built rescue boat was shipped to Japan.

Annual training workshops are held to ensure that the lifeboat is maintained as a practical asset for the local community, and as an excuse for students of Jenkins' old school, UWC Atlantic College, to meet and work with the people of Kamaishi.

Art and design may not be the first things that come to mind when thinking of post-tsunami reconstruction. However, if the northeastern coastline of Japan is going to recover after the debris and irradiated soil are cleared away, it faces the same economic and social problems that threaten all rural areas of Japan.

In 1987, the Ministry of International Trade and Industry attempted to combat rural decline with the introduction of a Resort Law that parachuted theme parks such as Huis Ten Bosch into outlying areas. After the bubble burst, most of those theme parks had to close or restructure. No more bread for the circuses, as it were.

Can art and design succeed where leisure resorts failed? METI's Cool Japan/Creative Industries Policy was launched two months after the 2011 disaster, and the proliferation of regional art festivals and biennales around Japan ever since is evidence that they are taken seriously as tools of economic policy.

The notion of anything "cool" coming out of a central bureaucracy is lamentable but, at the very least, creative practice is seen as having value in the abstract. From this there is a space to think about what is possible, and that is better than being left to lament what is lost, or trying to return a status quo that already had inherent problems.

Ready to return?

March 13, 2017

Another reduction coming for Fukushima nuclear evacuation area

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/03/13/national/another-reduction-coming-fukushima-nuclear-evacuation-area/#.WMaf1fKISos>

JJI

FUKUSHIMA – The radiation evacuation area in Fukushima Prefecture will shrink to 30 percent of its initial size by April 1, six years after the March 2011 meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Of the 11 municipalities within the originally designated evacuation area, five have seen evacuation orders fully or partially lifted since April 2014.

Four others will follow on March 31 and April 1, rolling back the evacuation zone by 70 percent since the disaster.

Close to 20,000 registered residents in the five municipalities are now allowed to return home, but only 13.5 percent have opted to do so.

Persistent concerns about radiation exposure and slow infrastructure restoration are the main reasons that evacuees have not moved back, according to surveys.

In Naraha, where evacuation orders were completely lifted in September 2015, only 781 of 7,276 residents have returned. Most are elderly.

“I want to return because it’s my hometown, but I worry whether commercial facilities and medical institutions can continue operations in a town without young people,” said a housewife in her 60s who has evacuated to Iwaki, about 35 km to the south.

According to surveys by the Reconstruction Agency, the proportion of those who have stayed away from their hometowns as of last November stood at 31.1 percent for the town of Kawamata, 28.3 percent for the village of Katsurao and 26.1 percent for the city of Minamisoma.

Many in Minamisoma, the towns of Namie and Tomioka, and the village of Kawauchi cited a lack of shops, public transportation and other services essential to everyday life as reasons for not returning to their hometowns.

The proportion of people who cited concerns over medical services topped 40 percent each in those municipalities.

In Minamisoma, 54.8 percent expressed safety concerns over nuclear power and 40.7 percent noted worries about radiation.

The central and local governments have worked hard to lure back former and new residents through facility and infrastructure construction.

Tomioka, where the evacuation order will be lifted for most of the town on April 1, plans to open a temporary emergency hospital at a cost of ¥2.4 billion.

The municipal government also provides financial support and consulting services to businesses, while working on an “Innovation Coast” project to attract new industries, such as renewable energy and robotics, to the town.

“If people find it difficult to secure living standards they have at their current temporary homes back in their original hometowns, they won’t be able to return to their homes anytime soon,” said Ryusuke Takaki, an associate professor at Iwaki Meisei University.

see also NHK video :

March 10, 2017

<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/videos/20170310205653044/>

Tough choices for evacuees

Give and take in Fukushima

March 9, 2017

Give and Take in Fukushima

<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/editors/2/giveandtakeinfukushima/>

Support for survivors of the March 2011 disaster used to focus on donations and volunteering, but recent some projects have injected business know-how into that equation and it's paying off.

Fishermen in Koriyama City such as Sumiyuki Kumada say sales have fallen steadily since the 2011 disaster.

"Fukushima carp used to be the best-known and fetch the highest prices. But now they are the cheapest. We won't be able to survive unless we get back the brand power we once had," Kumada says.

City officials decided it was time to get outside help, and they teamed up with businesses from around Japan to promote the freshwater fish.

One of the companies taking part is a leading beer-maker. They assembled a carp promotion team that's developing dishes that go well with beer and they're supplying the recipes to restaurants in Fukushima.

"In this project, we are helping to reinvigorate carp farming while trying to raise our brand value," says Masaya Hayashida, an official at Kirin.

Carp farms aren't the only breeding grounds for business in the region. Doctors at one clinic are using a new system to access patients' medical records that's loaded on tablet computers. A quick tap brings up information on 4,000 patients anytime, anywhere.

The system was developed by office equipment-maker Fuji Xerox. Until recently, they had little experience in the medical field. It all started when the company donated copy machines to hospitals. Staff heard about a challenge facing doctors in the disaster-hit communities.

Many patients lost their homes in the disaster -- and are still living in temporary housing.

"I visited elderly people but I didn't have access to their blood test results, clinical history and so on. That made me less confident about my diagnoses," says Dr. Akira Kamimura.

The office equipment-maker used its software knowhow to come up with a solution. It gives doctors Internet access to their patients' medical records whenever and wherever they need it.

"The system allows me to do my job accurately and helps me save time. It has become indispensable for me," Kamimura says.

Other medical institutions have adopted the system, generating contracts worth 5.3 million dollars for the company.

"Our interactions with people from disaster stricken areas helped us come up with new ideas, and led to more business," says Kunishi Higuchi, an official at Fuji Xerox.

It's an unlikely partnership, but it paid off for both the community and the company.

Fukushima still tormented by divisions

March 11, 2017

EDITORIAL: Divisions still haunt residents of Fukushima on 6th anniversary

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201703110056.html>

Some experiences are so horrific that it seems almost impossible to find sufficient words to describe how they affected people.

Certainly, that is the case with the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami disaster that led to the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

That is probably why some people in the disaster areas resort to composing short poems based on the traditional “tanka” format to express the emotion that overwhelm them.

One resident composed this poignant poem on his thoughts about being forced to leave his ancestral home: "I'm now leaving/ My home with anger/ Though I had done/ Nothing wrong."

The late Kenichi Tanigawa, a leading postwar folklorist and poet, compiled a collection of 130 or so tanka poems written by people caught up in the events of March 11, 2011. The anthology, titled “Kanashimi no Umi” (Sea of sorrow), was published in 2012, the year before he died.

On this sixth anniversary of the disaster, there are still disturbing signs of complicated, multi-layered divisions tormenting people in Fukushima Prefecture. Around 80,000 people from the prefecture, where the crippled nuclear power plant is located, are still living as evacuees. Divisions have emerged between people from Fukushima and those outside the prefecture as well as between evacuees and other residents of the prefecture and even among evacuees themselves.

A survey of Fukushima Prefecture residents at the end of February by The Asahi Shimbun and Fukushima Broadcasting Co., a local television broadcaster, found that 30 percent of the respondents said they had faced discrimination simply because they are residents of the prefecture.

One evacuee wrote a poem to vent his feelings about this: "Don't come close to me/ So I won't catch your radiation/ a child says/ To a kid from an evacuated area."

It is depressing to know that the false rumors behind these cruel words are still circulating.

INVISIBLE BARRIERS

It is impossible to discuss the situation in Fukushima Prefecture without referring to such topics as nuclear power plants, radiation, decontamination, evacuation and compensation.

These are issues that sorely test the knowledge and thinking of the talker.

It is widely believed that the problems facing Fukushima are complicated and intractable. Many people feel intimidated by the difficulty of the problems.

This is the “wall” that sociologist Hiroshi Kainuma pointed out two years ago, and it still exists.

This spring, evacuation orders for wide stretches of coastal areas in the prefecture will be lifted, allowing some 32,000 people to return home. But there is still no prospect of a homecoming for 24,000 others.

At the same time, housing aid for people who voluntarily left their homes in the prefecture will be terminated.

Some Fukushima residents will finally return home, while others are opting not to. Still others can't return even if they want to.

As differences in the positions and decisions of evacuees have surfaced afresh, some families are becoming targets of malicious rumors fueled in part by disgruntlement about different amounts of compensation paid to victims.

An investigation by Takuya Tsujiuchi, a researcher at Waseda University, has found that stress levels among Fukushima evacuees currently living in the Tokyo metropolitan area have taken an upturn this year.

FORGING NEW TIES

This nation's postwar history has witnessed many similar divisions and attempts to heal them.

Look at the Minamata disease problem, for instance.

The city in Kumamoto Prefecture is known for Minamata disease, a neurological syndrome caused by mercury poisoning blamed on contaminated wastewater discharged into Minamata Bay from a Chisso Corp. chemical plant.

The public health disaster engendered bitter antagonism between victims and other citizens. Some victims became targets of verbal abuse. They were called “fake patients” and accused of having a “palace built on weird disease.”

But the abusers also faced discrimination once they left the city simply because they were from Minamata. Tanigawa, who traveled across the nation for folklore research, was born in Minamata.

“Only people born and raised in Minamata can understand the cutting pain we feel when we say, ‘I’m from Minamata of Minamata disease,’ when asked, ‘Where are you from?’ he once said.

Tanigawa probably felt strong sympathy for the sorrow of Fukushima evacuees who only say they are from the Tohoku region since they can’t bring themselves to disclose they are from Fukushima.

Some two decades ago, Minamata’s municipal government started a program to re-establish ties among citizens as a way to heal divisions.

The local government named the program “moyai naoshi” (re-mooring) to indicate that it was an attempt to build fresh ties between people like tying boats with ropes.

The program was designed to provide experiences that help bring citizens together for tasks such as separating rubbish for ecological disposal and planting trees to create forests.

“What is vital is for people to have dialogue while accepting differences in their opinions,” says Masazumi Yoshii, who was the city’s mayor when the effort started.

The program still has a long way to go before achieving its goal. Sixty-one years since Minamata disease was officially recognized, there are still unfounded rumors about Minamata disease.

In January, an elementary school student from another town in Kumamoto Prefecture said, “I can catch Minamata disease” after a sports match with a team from Minamata.

“Even desperate efforts by citizens cannot easily solve the problem,” says Masami Ogata, who heads a group of Minamata disease “storytellers,” or Minamata disease survivors who volunteer to talk about their experiences at the Minamata Disease Municipal Museum.

“All we can do is to face what is happening now and tackle problems one at a time,” Ogata says. “That’s our message from Minamata.”

THE TASK AHEAD

Through his life, Tanigawa, the folklorist, loved the islands of Okinawa. The southern island prefecture has also been suffering from divisions because of the heavy presence of U.S. military bases there.

The prefecture, which occupies only 0.6 percent of national land, is host to 71 percent of all facilities exclusively used by the U.S. military in Japan.

Against this backdrop, residents of the prefecture have been divided over related issues, such as “peace” versus “economy.”

The cultural climates of different parts of the nation are attractive in their own unique ways.

Tanigawa, who knew that well, didn’t like arguments focused exclusively on the key problems facing specific regions, such as nuclear power plants for Fukushima and U.S. bases for Okinawa, even if they are driven by a sense of justice and a desire to support the regions.

Outside supporters “are only interested in ‘Minamata of Minamata disease,’” he said. That, he pointed out, has created a situation where Minamata itself, with all its diverse aspects, has been forgotten. His words should be taken very seriously.

One-sided arguments on problems facing Fukushima that ignore the actual feelings and thoughts of local residents cannot draw the attention of people who regard the issues as too complicated and intractable.

As a result, the burden of dealing with problems that should be of concern to the entire nation will continue to be shouldered only by specific regions.

This is a warning that the media should also take seriously.

A woman expressed her yearning for Fukushima before the disasters struck: "I don't want to see/ Fukushima known worldwide/ I just long for/ the tranquil region Fukushima once was."

The reconstruction of coastal areas in Fukushima Prefecture has just begun.

The rest of the nation should stand ready to offer support and sympathy to the local communities to help them go through the long, arduous process.

--The Asahi Shimbun, March 11

Lonely Fukushima



The exclusion zone of Futaba. Most of the town, just four miles from the nuclear plant, may never be reoccupied. (Ko Sasaki for The New York Times)

March 12, 2017

The Lonely Towns of Fukushima

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/SDI201703121046.html>

By MOTOKO RICH/ © 2017 The New York Times

Thousands of people fled from their homes, offices and schools six years ago after a devastating earthquake and tsunami caused a meltdown at a nuclear power plant in Fukushima, Japan. To this day, few have returned, leaving behind ghost towns where eerie signs of the departed linger under a caking of dust.

Tomioka, a little more than 6 miles south of the Fukushima Daiichi plant, was home to 15,830 people before the accident. They left in a hurry. At a ramen restaurant on the main road through town, dishes were left in the sink.

Some towns, like most of Futaba, just 4 miles from the nuclear plant, may never be reoccupied. Wandering its deserted streets, catching a glimpse of a piece of a child's artwork here, a worker's old Rolodex file there, I am hit by an unstinting sense of loss and devastation.

Evidence of sudden flight is everywhere. The earthquake shook an elementary school so vigorously that students could not even stay standing. When the children left, they assumed they would return a few days later. Instead, they left and never came back.

The portraits of past principals lay scattered on the floor, the forgotten history of an abandoned school. Most of the 21,434 people who lived in the town of Namie have put down roots elsewhere. They are now asking that the town simply demolish their homes. A little over 800 houses and shops have been knocked down already; another 1,280 are on a waiting list.

In Tomioka, I met Chiharu Matsumoto, 68, a former resident who volunteers at a rest center in town for people returning just to clean out or get things from their homes. She lives in a city to the west now and said she did not plan to move back. Her grown children have not visited Tomioka since evacuating after the disaster.

"They do not know how much radiation they might receive," she said.

The government says it will be safe for residents to return in April. So far, 304 people have moved back on temporary permits. With so few people returning, it makes little sense for many commercial operations to restart. Many of the convenience stores, restaurants and pachinko gambling parlors have yet to be cleaned up or repaired.

Some scientists say radiation in many towns has fallen to levels that should not cause long-term health problems; others ask whether even low doses are safe. But "the situation is much beyond science," said Dr. Otsura Niwa, chairman of the Radiation Effects Research Foundation in Hiroshima, who has conducted extensive sampling in Fukushima since the disaster. "It's the human element which is playing the biggest role."

The people most likely to return are the elderly. Ichiro Tagawa, 77, moved back to Namie on a special permit in September and reopened the bicycle repair shop that has been in his family for 80 years.

"I am so old I don't really care about the radiation levels," he said, "and in fact it is very low."

Another reason he wanted to return was to be near his family's grave sites. One large cemetery near the coastline was heavily damaged by the tsunami.

"We want to visit our ancestors' graves," Tagawa said. "But we are living in a very lonely town."

(March 10, 2017)

Post-disaster mourning

March 13, 2017

VOX POPULI: To relive our 3/11 experiences now and then is hard but necessary

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201703130022.html>

"Aren't you feeling lonely without me being near you?" a mother asked in a letter to her 6-year-old daughter who died in the harrowing disaster that struck Japan's northeastern Tohoku region in March 2011. "Are you playing happily with your friends? Are you eating well?"

"I want to see you again, even if it is in a dream," the mother writes. "I want to embrace you." Her letter to her deceased daughter is included in "Hiai" (sorrowful love), a collection of letters written by people who lost their loved ones in the disaster. The collection was compiled by Kiyoshi Kanebishi, a professor at Tohoku Gakuin University, as a record of personal tragedies caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake.

In another letter in the book, a widow writes about why she talks every day to the family Buddhist altar dedicated to her late husband. Otherwise, she writes, he is likely to say, "Who are you?" when she meets him again in the future as an old woman with a wrinkled face.

"When we laugh here, you also laugh with us, don't you?" says one passage in a letter written by a woman to her deceased younger sister.

Six years since the crushing calamity, many of the people bereaved of their loved ones still continue struggling with a profound sense of loss and mourning.

Back then, the post-disaster reconstruction was compared to Japan's postwar regeneration.

Various ideas were proposed as to how a new future should be built for the nation through a process as dramatic as Japan's rise from the ashes after the end of World War II.

But the expectations for a new future appear to have been replaced by inertia.

Evacuees from areas affected by the nuclear disaster are still suffering from verbal abuse and prejudice.

As the landscapes of devastated cities and towns change, the initial impact of the experience inevitably weakens over time. Memories of what happened on that day become increasingly hazy and eventually die out.

That's why we need to make efforts to relive and revisit our experience of the disaster from time to time.

A huge banner was recently hung on the side of a building in Tokyo's Ginza district to show how high the tsunami was when it hit the city of Ofunato, Iwate Prefecture, on that day.

As I looked up at the red line on the banner indicating the maximum height at which the tsunami was observed, roughly as high as a five-story building, I felt dizzy.

It was a balmy weekend day when Ginza was bustling with shoppers.

The chilling sign made me appreciate afresh our ordinary, uneventful daily lives and also aware of how easily they could be destroyed.

--The Asahi Shimbun, March 12

Signs of exodus remain

March 13, 2017

SIX YEARS AFTER: Signs of exodus from nuclear disaster remain in empty hamlet

By CHIKAKO KAWAHARA/ Staff Writer

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201703130029.html>

NAMIE, Fukushima Prefecture--Six years after the nuclear accident, a bulletin board close to the entrance of Tsushima junior high school is still covered with messages left by evacuees asking that family members contact them.

The quaint hamlet of Tsushima was overwhelmed on March 12, 2011, as residents fled from areas closer to the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant where a hydrogen explosion at the No. 1 reactor building led to the spewing of radioactive materials.

The chaos from that period remains in parts of Tsushima, which has been declared a difficult-to-return zone for residents because of the continuing high levels of radiation.

A reporter visited Tsushima on March 12 with the permission of the Namie town government.

At its closest, Namie is only about eight kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. The Tsushima area is about 30 km away.

Before the nuclear accident, Tsushima had about 1,400 residents living in 450 households. But once the hydrogen explosion rocked the plant, about 8,000 evacuees converged on the hamlet.

Various schools such as Tsushima junior high school became temporary gathering points for the evacuees. The gymnasium of the local senior high school is now littered with blankets and empty bottles, mixed in with the dirt and animal droppings that have accumulated over the years.

New hope for Fukushima food produce?

March 15, 2017

Signs of hope for Fukushima food producers shut out of overseas markets

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/03/15/national/signs-hope-fukushima-food-producers-shut-overseas-markets/#.WMrROGdFeos>

JJI

Import bans on Japan's fishery and agricultural products are still in place for some countries six years after the Fukushima nuclear disaster. New markets in Southeast Asia, however, are giving some producers signs of hope, according to industry sources.

Safety concerns over Japanese products remain especially strong in China and other neighboring economies, putting domestic fish and agricultural exporters in a bind.

Miyagi Prefecture, the largest producer of sea squirts before the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, used to ship about 70 percent of its haul to South Korea.

In 2013, South Korea halted fish imports from eight prefectures in Japan, including Miyagi, Iwate and Fukushima. As a result, Miyagi was forced to dispose of close to 7,600 tons of unsold sea squirts from its farms last year.

"We were asked to cut prices based on the idea that sea squirts can't be sold elsewhere," said Masao Atsumi, 39, who farms sea squirts in Samenoura Bay in Miyagi's Ishinomaki city.

While seeking to find new revenue sources, such as sea cucumber fishing, Atsumi said, "We are looking forward to the lifting of the South Korean import ban."

After the disaster, 54 countries and regions imposed restrictions on imports of Japanese agricultural and fishery products, according to Japan's fisheries ministry.

That number has fallen to 33 countries and regions, of which many have eased regulations and allowed some products that bear certificates of origin.

Last year, the European Union, known for strict food safety standards, decided to loosen its regulations on food imports from Japan.

Still China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao, South Korea, Singapore and Russia have kept their markets closed to certain farm and fisheries products from specific regions, continuing bans partly to avoid criticism for taking a weak stance against the country, sources familiar with the situation said.

The announcement by Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen's government that it was considering lifting the import ban from four prefectures last November spurred intense opposition from the Kuomintang Party, which had previously been in favor of the ban's removal when the party was in power.

"Japanese food products have become a political issue," a person familiar with Japan-Taiwan relations said.

Heightened awareness of food safety has also been a factor.

In China, the memory of infant deaths caused by tainted baby formula in 2008 lingers on, while a larger and wealthier middle class have continued to demand improved food safety and product quality.

Although food produced domestically has passed the Japanese government's safety standards, "worries about radioactive substances remains strong," a person familiar with Japan-China relations said.

Taiwan was rocked by a scandal in 2014 where substandard cooking oil distributed to many restaurants was discovered to have been recycled from waste oil.

Southeast Asian countries have emerged as attractive markets for Japanese products owing to fewer political hurdles.

Fukushima Gov. Masao Uchibori visited Thailand in May last year as part of a campaign to promote peaches grown in his prefecture, home to Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc.'s Fukushima No. 1 power plant.

By working with logistics companies and retailers in the two countries, the prefecture succeeded in lowering local retail prices for Fukushima peaches to 400 baht (¥1,300) for two peaches, down from 1,200 baht. This was accomplished by changing the method of shipping from air to sea, using cutting-edge freezer container technology.

"Although only wealthy customers used to buy Fukushima peaches, demand for the fruit as a gift has increased," said an official of Isetan Mitsukoshi Holdings Ltd.'s Isetan department store in Bangkok.

Peach exports from Fukushima to Thailand totaled 20 tons in 2016, up about 15 times on the previous year and exceeding 9.9 tons exported just before the disaster to China, which had been the largest importer.

With shipments of Fukushima peaches expanding to Malaysia and other Southeast Asian countries, officials in the prefecture hope they are finding a way out of the disaster-caused doldrums.

Cows left to starve



One of the gnawed wooden posts is pictured in a cattle shed in Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, on March 3, 2017. (Mainichi)

March 14, 2017

Starving Fukushima cows gnawed wooden posts in cattle shed

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170314/p2a/00m/0na/006000c>

MINAMISOMA, Fukushima -- Starving cows abandoned here after the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster apparently gnawed at wooden posts in their cattle shed in a desperate bid to survive.

- **【Related】** Father determined to find entire remains of daughter killed by 3/11 tsunami
- **【Related】** Decontamination work in Fukushima Pref. far from finished business
- **【Related】** 1,436 evacuees have died in temporary housing since 2011 earthquake

Dairy farmer Issei Hangui, 67, had kept about 40 milk cows in the shed in the Odaka district of Minamisoma, within 20 kilometers of the nuclear plant. However, restrictions were imposed on the movement of livestock following the March 2011 outbreak of the nuclear crisis at the power plant. Hangui tied up his animals in the cow shed and left his home to take shelter elsewhere.

Hangui said he knew what would happen to his cows.

In the summer of 2011, he returned to the shed to remove the cows' carcasses to bury them. In the shed, he found signs that his cows had gnawed on the wooden posts up to about 60 centimeters from the ground. The desperate cows appear to have chewed on the posts after their feed ran out and they began to starve.

Six years have passed since the March 2011 triple disaster. Hangui has quit dairy farming due to the guilt he felt for leaving his cows to die.

"I've preserved my cattle shed to remember the cows," said Hangui.

A prefectural museum is planning to make a cast of at least one of the gnawed wooden posts for a replica.

Govt and TEPCO must compensate

March 17, 2017

Court orders TEPCO, state to pay evacuees of nuclear disaster

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201703170069.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

MAEBASHI--A court here on March 17 held the government and Tokyo Electric Power Co. accountable for the Fukushima nuclear disaster and ordered them to pay compensation to evacuees.

The ruling by the Maebashi District Court was the first in a series of group lawsuits over the nuclear accident.

The court ordered the government and TEPCO to pay a total of 38.55 million yen (\$340,000) to 62 plaintiffs who evacuated to Gunma Prefecture after the disaster started to unfold at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011.

The group of 137 plaintiffs had demanded 11 million yen each in compensation.

The court accepted most of the plaintiffs' arguments about how the government and TEPCO failed to prevent the triple meltdown at the plant.

The plaintiffs pointed out that TEPCO in May 2008 obtained an estimate of a tsunami as high as 15.7 meters that could hit the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

A wave around that height did hit the plant on March 11, 2011, knocking out power and leading to the reactor meltdowns.

The court said if the utility had installed emergency diesel electric generators on higher ground, it could have prevented the nuclear disaster.

The court also said it was possible for the government to predict the tsunami.

In its long-term estimate announced in July 2002, the government said the probability of an earthquake striking in the Japan Trench off the coast of northeastern Japan, including the sea area off the Fukushima No. 1 plant, was "about 20 percent within 30 years."

The magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake spawned the tsunami that devastated coastal areas of the Tohoku region, including the nuclear plant.

If the government had used its regulatory powers to make TEPCO take countermeasures, such as installing seawalls, against such an event, the nuclear disaster could have been avoided, the ruling said.

The government and TEPCO argued that the long-term estimate and the May 2008 tsunami estimate were not established facts.

They also said the tsunami on March 11, 2011, was much larger than anticipated, making it impossible to prevent the nuclear accident.

Another point of dispute was whether TEPCO was paying a reasonable amount in compensation to evacuees based on intermediate guidelines compiled by a government screening panel.

TEPCO currently pays 100,000 yen a month to each person who was living in government-designated evacuation zones around the nuclear plant. The utility has also paid 40,000 yen to 720,000 yen to each person who lived outside the evacuation zones but evacuated “voluntarily.”

The plaintiffs argued that guidelines are overly simplistic and do not take into account all the damages the evacuees have suffered.

TEPCO argued that the intermediate guidelines are reasonable. It said that even if voluntary evacuees experienced anxieties or a sense of crisis over radiation exposure, their legal rights have not been infringed upon.

More than 40 percent of the plaintiffs are voluntary evacuees.

About 30 similar lawsuits involving about 12,000 people have been filed throughout the country.

March 17, 2017

Govt., TEPCO ordered to compensate evacuees

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20170317_24/

A court in Japan has found the central government and Tokyo Electric Power Company liable for failing to prevent the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident.

In a ruling on Friday, the Maebashi District Court in Gunma Prefecture ordered the government and TEPCO to pay more than 38 million yen, or about 335,000 dollars, in damages to a group of 137 evacuees.

The plaintiffs moved to Gunma Prefecture from parts of Fukushima Prefecture, including areas near the damaged Fukushima Daiichi plant.

They demanded 97,000 dollars in compensation each, about 13 million dollars in total, for the loss of their livelihoods and emotional distress.

The tsunami that hit northeastern Japan on March 11th, 2011, led to a triple meltdown at the plant and took out all of its power sources.

Presiding judge Michiko Hara said that both the government and TEPCO could have foreseen the tsunami based on a 2002 report by a government research agency. The report warned of a 20 percent chance of a magnitude-8 class earthquake hitting the region within 30 years.

The judge said TEPCO could easily have taken preventive measures, such as installing emergency generators on higher ground, and that the government could have ordered TEPCO to take such measures.

The case is the first to be decided among a series of suits filed by more than 12,000 people with courts in Tokyo and 17 prefectures.

See video : <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/videos/20170317173813028/>

Govt, Tepco ordered to pay damages

Court: State and TEPCO must compensate

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20170317_23/

A court in Japan has ordered the government and Tokyo Electric Power Company to pay damages to evacuees of the 2011 nuclear accident.

The ruling is the first among similar suits filed across the country to order compensation.

137 evacuees mainly living in Gunma Prefecture northwest of Tokyo, filed the suit. They were seeking damages for emotional distress suffered after losing their livelihoods.

A first: Govt & TEPCO found liable for Fukushima disaster



Lawyers hold banners following a ruling by the Maebashi District Court on a Fukushima nuclear disaster damage suit, in Maebashi, Gunma Prefecture, on March 17, 2017. One of the banners reads, "Partial victory in the suit." (Mainichi)

March 17, 2017

Gov't, TEPCO found liable for Fukushima nuclear disaster for 1st time

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170317/p2g/00m/0dm/079000c>

MAEBASHI, Japan (Kyodo) -- A district court on Friday found negligence by the central government and plant operator contributed to the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant disaster in March 2011.

The Maebashi District Court ruling, which awarded a total of 38.55 million yen (\$340,000) in damages to people who have fled from Fukushima Prefecture, ruled that the government and plant operator were negligent in preparing anti-tsunami measures.

Lawyers for the plaintiffs said it was the first time a Japanese court had recognized such negligence played a part in the worst nuclear catastrophe since Chernobyl.

The ruling was the first among a series of lawsuits filed by people who were forced to leave after three reactors melted down at the plant operated by Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc., in the days after a massive earthquake and then tsunami struck northeastern Japan on March 11, 2011.

Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant is pictured in this photo taken from a Mainichi helicopter on March 10, 2017. (Mainichi)

The court said the nuclear disaster was preventable, saying the state should have used its regulatory powers to make TEPCO take preventive steps.

The 137 plaintiffs, now relocated to Gunma Prefecture and elsewhere, have sought a combined 1.5 billion yen in damages for emotional distress, saying they have lost their livelihoods and faced inconvenience for an extensive period, and the amount they receive under the current state compensation guidelines is not enough.

The plaintiffs comprised 76 people instructed to evacuate and 61 people who fled at their own discretion. Issues during the trial centered on whether the state and TEPCO could have foreseen the tsunami and whether the amount of TEPCO's compensation under state guidelines is sufficient.

The plaintiffs claimed the state and TEPCO could have foreseen tsunami over 10 meters high hitting the plant based on a 2002 government estimate that there was roughly a 20 percent chance of a magnitude-8-level tsunami-triggering earthquake occurring within the next 30 years.

The state and TEPCO argued they could not have foreseen what happened, and even if they had taken measures against tsunami based on the long-term estimate, they could not have avoided the consequence.

[See also :](#)

In first, government and Tepco found liable for Fukushima disaster

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/03/17/national/crime-legal/first-government-tepco-found-liable-fukushima-disaster/#.WM1YOmdFeot>

by Daisuke Kikuchi
Staff Writer

Maebashi, Gunma Pref. – A court in Japan has ruled for the first time that the government and the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant were responsible for failing to take preventive measures against the March 11, 2011, quake-triggered tsunami that killed scores and forced tens of thousands from their homes.

Friday's stunning ruling by the Maebashi District Court was the first to recognize negligence by the state and Tokyo Electric Power Co. Holdings Inc. It called the massive tsunami predictable and said the major nuclear disaster could have been avoided.

The district court ordered the two to pay damages totaling ¥38.55 million to 62 of 137 plaintiffs from 45 households located near the plant, which suffered a triple meltdown caused by the tsunami, awarding ¥70,000 to ¥3.5 million in compensation to each plaintiff.

The plaintiffs had demanded the state and Tepco pay compensation of ¥11 million each — a total of about ¥1.5 billion — over the loss of local infrastructure and psychological stress they were subjected to after being forced to relocate to unfamiliar surroundings.

Citing a government estimate released in July 2002, the court said in the ruling that "Tepco was capable of foreseeing several months after (the estimate) that a large tsunami posed a risk to the facility and could possibly flood its premises and damage safety equipment, such as the backup power generators."

It pointed out that the state should have ordered Tepco to take bolstered preventive measures, and criticized the utility for prioritizing costs over safety.

Of the plaintiffs, 76 who lived in evacuation zones were forced to move, while another 61 evacuated voluntarily even though their houses were located outside evacuation zones. The ruling was the first of 30 similar class-action suits filed nationwide involving more than 10,000 plaintiffs.

About 80,000 citizens who had lived in Fukushima reportedly left the prefecture after the March 2011 disaster.

"I believe that the ruling saying both the government and Tepco were equally responsible is an important judgment," Katsuyoshi Suzuki, the lead lawyer for the defense said at a news conference following the ruling. "But thinking about the psychological distress (the plaintiffs faced) after being forced to evacuate from their homes, I think the amount is not enough."

Takehiro Matsuta, 38, one of the plaintiffs who evacuated from the city of Koriyama, hailed the ruling, but called the damages "disappointing."

"The ruling was one big step for my family, for those who evacuated from Fukushima to Gunma, and for tens of thousands of earthquake victims nationwide," he said.

But called the payout "disappointing," as his child, who was 3 years old at the time of the nuclear disaster, was not granted compensation. "My wife and I are struggling everyday, but it's my child who suffers the most."

The group of lawyers for the plaintiffs, which have had suits filed since September 2011, claimed that the Fukushima disaster resulted in serious human rights violations by forcing victims to relocate after the crisis caused widespread environmental damage.

The plaintiffs argued that Tepco could have prevented the damage if it had implemented measures, including the building of breakwaters, based on its 2008 tsunami trial calculation that showed waves of over 10 meters could hit the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

Those calculations took into account the 2002 estimate by the government's Headquarters for Earthquake Research Promotion, which concluded that there was a 20 percent chance of a magnitude-8 earthquake rocking areas off Fukushima within 30 years.

However, the government and Tepco have argued that the massive tsunami was unexpected, claiming that there were different opinions among scholars over the long-term evaluation. Both attacked the credibility of the study, calling it unscientific.

The government also objected to the ruling, saying that because it had no authority to force Tepco to take such preventive measures as argued by the plaintiffs, it bore no responsibility.

According to the defense, a number of other class suits are inching closer to rulings, with one in the city of Chiba scheduled for Sept. 22 and another in the city of Fukushima involving 4,000 plaintiffs expected by the year's end.

Information from Kyodo added

Evacuees disappointed

March 18, 2017

Fukushima nuke disaster evacuees disappointed by court's compensation award

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170318/p2a/00m/0na/017000c>

Fukushima Prefecture evacuees in a class action suit over the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster were disappointed by the 38.55 million yen in total compensation awarded on March 17 by the Maebashi District Court, as the amount was just one-fortieth what they had been seeking.

- **【Related】** Voluntary evacuees granted only small awards in Fukushima nuke disaster damage case
- **【Related】** Gov't and TEPCO put money before safety at Fukushima nuclear plant: court ruling
- **【Related】** Gov't, TEPCO found liable for Fukushima nuclear disaster for 1st time

"I was expecting to hear a ruling that would support us more," one of the plaintiffs said after the verdict, which came 3 1/2 years after they filed the suit and six years after the disaster's onset.

"We have made the court recognize the responsibility of the central government and plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO). I am honestly happy about that," plaintiff Sugie Tanji, 60, said to a gathering following the ruling. However, she continued, "The past six years was filled with many hardships. I wonder if I can convince myself to accept the ruling..."

Tanji was a resident of Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture. Her 63-year-old husband Mikio ran a repair business, but orders plunged following the No. 1 plant meltdowns. Four months later, the couple voluntarily evacuated to Gunma Prefecture.

Although Tanji felt guilty for leaving fellow residents behind, she took part in anti-nuclear power rallies and demonstrations in Gunma Prefecture and joined the class action suit, believing that there must never be another nuclear disaster.

Of the 137 plaintiffs from 45 households, representatives of almost all the households appeared in court, testifying to the agony of living as evacuees and expressing their anger toward TEPCO and the central government. However, only a few of them have made their names public out of concern for possible discrimination against their children and negative effects on their jobs. Tanji herself recalls being told, "You can get money if you go to court, can't you?"

Under government guidelines, those who evacuated voluntarily are entitled to only 80,000 yen in consolation money from TEPCO, including living expenses. The plaintiffs thought the amount was far too small considering the pain of losing their hometowns. However, only 62 of the 137 plaintiffs were awarded compensation.

"I was expecting a warmer ruling," said a woman in her 50s who sat in on the March 17 hearing clad in mourning attire. She was working part-time for a company in Iwaki, but was fired after the nuclear disaster impacted the firm's business performance.

This and radiation exposure fears prompted her and her husband to evacuate to Gunma Prefecture two months later. Her husband, however, developed a malignant brain tumor the following year, after the couple settled into an apartment that the Gunma Prefectural Government had rented for evacuees. Her husband died in the fall of 2014 at age 52.

The woman says she still doesn't feel like she can start working and subsists on her savings and survivor's pension. At the end of March, the Fukushima Prefectural Government is set to terminate its housing subsidies for voluntary evacuees. For her, the compensation awarded by the Maebashi District Court was "unimaginably low."

"I can't report the ruling to my husband," she said, wiping tears from her eyes.

March 18, 2017

Voluntary evacuees granted only small awards in Fukushima nuke disaster damage case

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170318/p2a/00m/0na/010000c>

Lawyers hold banners following a ruling by the Maebashi District Court on a Fukushima nuclear disaster damage suit, in Maebashi, Gunma Prefecture, on March 17, 2017. The banner to the right reads, "Partial victory in the suit." (Mainichi)

While the March 17 Maebashi District Court ruling acknowledged that both the central government and Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) are liable for the 2011 Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster, it dealt a harsh blow to those who voluntarily evacuated their Fukushima Prefecture homes in the wake of the meltdowns.

- **【Related】** Gov't and TEPCO put money before safety at Fukushima nuclear plant: court ruling
- **【Related】** Fukushima nuke disaster evacuees disappointed by court's compensation award
- **【Related】** Gov't, TEPCO found liable for Fukushima nuclear disaster for 1st time
- **【Related】** Editorial: Ruling on Fukushima nuclear crisis a grave admonition of gov't

The court awarded a total of 38.55 million yen in damages to 62 of the 137 plaintiffs who fled from Fukushima Prefecture to Gunma Prefecture and elsewhere -- about one-fortieth of the complainants' total compensation demand of approximately 1.5 billion yen. This was because the court acknowledged to some extent the rationale behind the government-set "interim guidelines" for TEPCO's compensation payment standards. The court rejected claims made by over half of the plaintiffs, saying that the amount of compensation they are entitled to does not exceed that which has already been paid by TEPCO.

The interim guidelines were set by the education ministry's Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation in August 2011 to ensure swift compensation to cover damages common to many residents in the nuclear disaster-hit areas. Based on the guidelines, TEPCO set up standards for compensation payments, such as a monthly payment of 100,000 yen per person for those from evacuation zones and, as a rule, one-off payments of 80,000 yen for each voluntary evacuee. Voluntary evacuees in nuclear disaster class-action suits across the country are arguing that 80,000 yen is too small an amount, considering that leaving Fukushima Prefecture was a reasonable decision.

Some experts have criticized the district court decision, saying that it only confirmed the legitimacy of the interim guidelines. At the same time, the ruling was based on the court's own calculation for deciding the compensation amount for each plaintiff, which set five "emotional distress" categories to be considered including the feeling of losing one's hometown.

Nevertheless, the compensation amounts in the ruling differed greatly between the plaintiffs from evacuation zones and voluntary evacuees. Nineteen plaintiffs who used to live in areas under evacuation orders were awarded compensation payments of between 750,000 yen and 3.5 million yen each, while 43 voluntary evacuees were granted awards of between 70,000 yen and 730,000 yen.

One of the plaintiffs who had voluntarily left the city of Iwaki was awarded about 200,000 yen in damages for the 10-day period right after the March 2011 meltdowns. However, the ruling denied that the same woman's decision to flee Fukushima Prefecture again two months after the meltdowns was rational,

saying that high radiation doses were not detected in Iwaki and no other particularly concerning circumstances were present.

Attorney Tsutomu Yonekura of the national liaison association of lawyers representing Fukushima nuclear disaster evacuees said of the Maebashi District Court ruling, "The amount of compensation provided for in the ruling remains at the same level as that set in the interim guidelines, even though the court claimed to have independently calculated the compensation payments. It's not enough as judicial redress."

Tomikawa: Trying to understand Fukushima

March 18, 2017

Asking the tough questions about Fukushima

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/03/18/national/media-national/asking-tough-questions-fukushima/#.WM1Xo2dFeos>

In January, regional newspaper Fukushima Minpo interviewed Yosuke Takagi, state minister of economy, trade and industry. While talking about reconstruction plans for areas near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, Takagi mentioned resurrecting Dash-mura (Dash Village), a farm created from scratch by boy band Tokio for its Nippon TV series "The Tetsuwan Dash."

The location of Dash-mura was always secret, lest Tokio's fans descend on the project and destroy its rustic purity. But following the reactor accident caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake, it was revealed that the farm was in an area declared off-limits due to its proximity to the plant. It was promptly abandoned.

A different news outlet, Fukushima Minyu, clarified that the revival of Dash-mura is "nothing more than a personal idea of Takagi's," but that he intends to discuss it with related parties. An 80-year-old farmer who once worked with Tokio on the project told Minyu that bringing back the farm would be a great PR boost for the area's agriculture, which is obviously Takagi's aim. The show's producer, however, after hearing of Takagi's comment, tweeted that he knew nothing about the news, adding cryptically that "Dash-mura is no one's thing."

The Huffington Post called the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry to ask if it had any intention of reviving Dash-mura. A representative only "confirmed" that Takagi had "made such a comment" and said METI had no "definite plan" to that end but might "study it."

Nevertheless, the idea fits in with the government's goal of getting former residents to move back to the area. Last week, authorities announced they would further reduce the evacuation zone at the end of the month, which means it will have shrunk by 70 percent since April 2014. The concern is that few people want to return. Some have already made lives for themselves elsewhere and see a lack of opportunity in their old communities.

Many also remain suspicious of the government's assurances that radioactivity has dropped to a safe level. There is still debate among experts as to whether or not the radiation in the area is dangerous. The government says that the problems caused by the accident are now "under control," and affected residents can soon go back to their old lives.

One media outlet who has challenged this assumption is TV Asahi's "Hodo Station." On March 9, the nightly news show sent its main announcer, Yuta Tomikawa, to Iitate, a village located about 40 km from the crippled nuclear facility. All 6,000 residents were eventually evacuated after the accident. Standing in front of rows of black plastic bags, Tomikawa reported that, according to the government, decontamination efforts have been a success. A safe annual radiation level is 1 millisievert, but a local dairy farmer told Tomikawa that his own readings showed five times that level, adding that 70 percent of Iitate is wooded and forest land had not been decontaminated yet.

Moreover, the government is lifting the evacuation order for any areas where annual radiation levels are "no more than" 20 mSv. The International Commission on Radiological Protection told the government that once the situation had stabilized in the affected areas, people could return if radiation dropped to between 1 and 20 mSv, but the lower the better. Exposure to 20 mSv for a short period may not be a problem, but it could have harmful effects in the long run.

Tomikawa did not say that people who returned to Iitate would be in danger, but he did imply that the government is manipulating numbers in an attempt to persuade evacuees to return to their homes. The web magazine Litera wrote that TV Asahi is the only mainstream media outlet to question the government line in this regard. Actually, Nippon TV did something similar, albeit indirectly. Last month, it rebroadcasted an episode of its "NNN Document" series about the married *manzai* (stand-up comedy) duo Oshidori Mako-Ken's efforts to come to terms with the Fukushima meltdowns and their aftermath. The couple belongs to the large Osaka-based entertainment company Yoshimoto Kogyo, but ever since the disaster Mako has attended about 500 related news conferences, making a nuisance of herself by plying Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings employees and government officials with questions the mainstream media don't usually ask.

In order to gain access to the news conferences, she offered stories to the weekly magazine Spa! Her editor there told Nippon TV that Mako is now respected or resented by a lot of full-time journalists, partly because she's a *geinojin* (entertainer) who has proved her mettle as a reporter, but mainly because of her hard-line queries, which put her interlocutors on the spot.

Following the disaster, Mako became suspicious when she saw people fleeing Tokyo in large numbers but heard nothing about it on the news. In order to make sense of the situation she'd watch unfiltered news conferences about the disaster on the internet. She realized only independent reporters asked tough questions, so she started attending them herself as a proxy for average people who didn't understand what was going on. The more officials obfuscated, the more she studied.

She's now recognized by some foreign press as one of the most informed persons on the subject — she even received a letter of encouragement from Pope Francis — and yet she's shunned by the Japanese press. Nevertheless, she has dedicated followers, including workers cleaning up the reactor who often feed her questions to ask of officials. She's won awards for her work, but from citizens groups, not media groups.

Nowadays, Mako and Ken do more free lectures on Fukushima No. 1 than they do comedy shows. One of their main themes is that media reports tend to confuse the public rather than inform them, but that's really the fault of the government, which would like nothing better than for people to feel as if nothing ever happened.

Lies?

March 20, 2017

Firms rebut TV report saying Japanese food from banned areas sold in China

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170320/p2a/00m/0na/006000c>

A China Central Television (CCTV) report stating that banned Japanese food products from eastern Japan were being sold in China has stirred controversy, as it contained inaccuracies.

Supporters of Japanese products in China have criticized the recent report, saying that the safety of Chinese food products is more of an issue.

In the wake of the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant in 2011, the Chinese government banned the import of Japanese food items produced in 10 Japanese prefectures including Fukushima, Miyagi, Ibaraki, Chiba and Tokyo. On Jan. 15 this year, CCTV reported that food products from "contaminated regions" were being sold with altered production area labels by retailers including Japanese-operated Muji and Aeon.

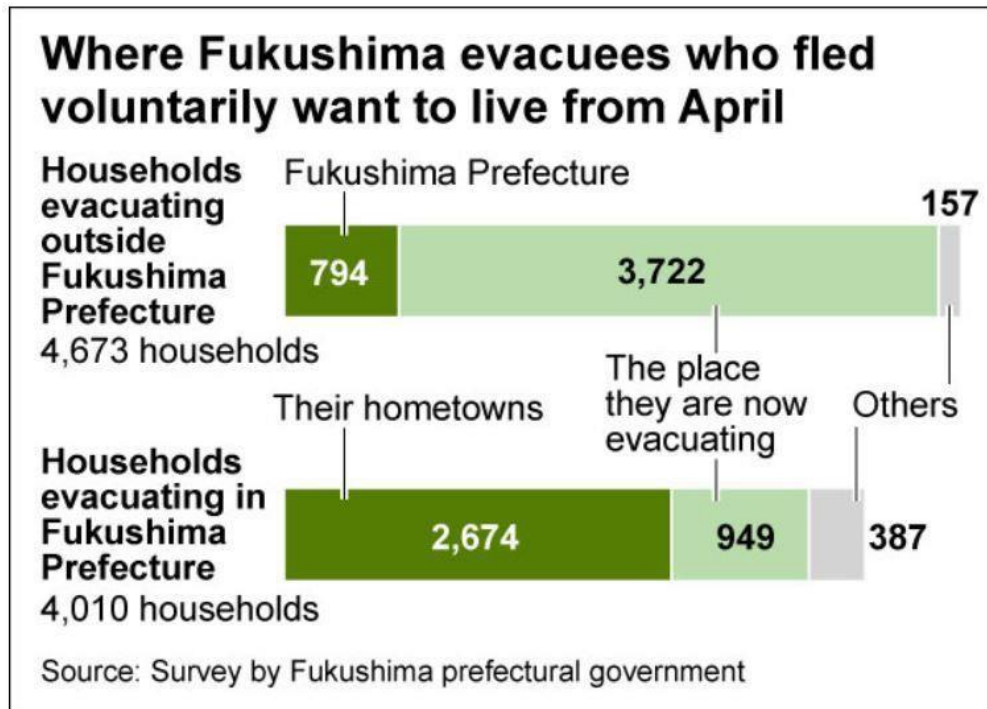
However, according to Muji operator Ryohin Keikaku Co., tea and sweets appearing in the report were produced in Fukui Prefecture and Osaka Prefecture, respectively. The company said that the products listed the address of the retailer's Tokyo headquarters and that it was possible CCTV had mistakenly assumed that Tokyo was where the products were manufactured.

Aeon's Chinese operator temporarily removed products for an inspection, but on March 17 it released a statement saying that the packs of rice in question were not from a banned area.

Inspection authorities in Beijing and Shanghai announced that they had not found any products from banned areas. One official with a Japan-related business said the CCTV report "gives the strong impression that it is conveying the Chinese government's position." It has been conjectured that as the popularity of Japan grows, the Chinese government wants to draw consumers back to domestic consumption.

The Japanese government has made repeated requests for China to lift its import ban.

Most "voluntary" evacuees have no intention to return



The Asahi Shimbun
 March 22, 2017

80% of families not going back to Fukushima after housing aid ends

By AYA NAGATANI/ Staff Writer

Eighty percent of households who fled but were not forced to evacuate from Fukushima Prefecture after the 2011 nuclear disaster do not intend to return even after their free housing allowance ends this month. According to the survey results released March 21, 3,722 households, or 80 percent of 4,673 households who had evacuated outside the prefecture, said they had no intention of returning.

As for the 4,010 households who fled but remained inside the prefecture, 949 households, or 24 percent, gave the same response, while 67 percent, or 2,674 households, planned to eventually return to their hometowns.

The statistics are based on responses from 8,683 households that evacuated out of 12,000 contacted by the Fukushima prefectural government.

The central and prefectural governments have provided free housing for evacuees from outside the designated evacuation zone since the nuclear accident triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and catastrophic tsunami.

It was announced in June 2015 the housing program would end this month.

Prefectural officials said part of the reason for the high ratio of people unwilling to return to Fukushima Prefecture is partly because they are uninformed about the rebuilding situation.

“Their resolve to stay away from the prefecture is firm due to concerns about radiation and other factors in the first place,” an official said. “In addition, it appears that they don’t have good access to information on what is going on in the prefecture.”

The number of people that had evacuated to locales inside and outside of Fukushima Prefecture on a voluntary basis totaled 30,000 as of October 2015.

Support groups have demanded the continuation of the housing program.

Whereas 97 percent of the total households contacted, or 11,896, replied that they have already decided on where they would live from April, 2 percent, or 227 households, responded otherwise as of March 10.

March 20, 2017

Ruling about school bullying

March 22, 2017

Kids bullied at new schools due to nuclear crisis get day in court

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201703220063.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

MAEBASHI--A landmark court ruling in a group lawsuit against the state and Tokyo Electric Power Co. found that five plaintiffs were psychologically abused as children after they transferred to new schools because of the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

The acknowledgement came in a voluminous March 17 ruling by the Maebashi District Court here that held the government and TEPCO, operator of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, accountable for the March 2011 disaster and ordered them to pay compensation to nearly half of the 137 plaintiffs.

The ruling was the first in a series of group lawsuits over the nuclear accident.

Asahi Shimbun reporters combing through the ruling analyzed cases made by 51 plaintiffs who were under the age of 18 when the nuclear disaster occurred.

The court ordered TEPCO and the government to pay compensation to two of the five plaintiffs for bullying and harassment they received as children while living as evacuees.

In the decision, the judge accepted statements by the five youngsters, both male and female, that they suffered psychological distress due to bullying and harassment at their elementary or junior high schools. However, it dismissed claims by three of the five plaintiffs that they are entitled to more compensation than the amount TEPCO has already paid to them.

According to the decision, a girl, whose family voluntarily evacuated from Fukushima Prefecture to Gunma Prefecture, was treated meanly by her classmates when she was in elementary school.

In one instance, she was asked to go to a festival by a classmate, but later told she was not welcome.

“No one from the class will go with you. That is what we decided on.”

On another occasion, she found that someone had placed a spiteful note in her bag that read: “Gross. Don’t come near us. You make us throw up.”

One boy was accused by classmates of “running away” when he returned to Fukushima Prefecture from Gunma Prefecture. Another boy was nicknamed “Fukushima-kun” at the new school he attended after he evacuated.

(This article was written by Jun Miura and Eishi Kado.)

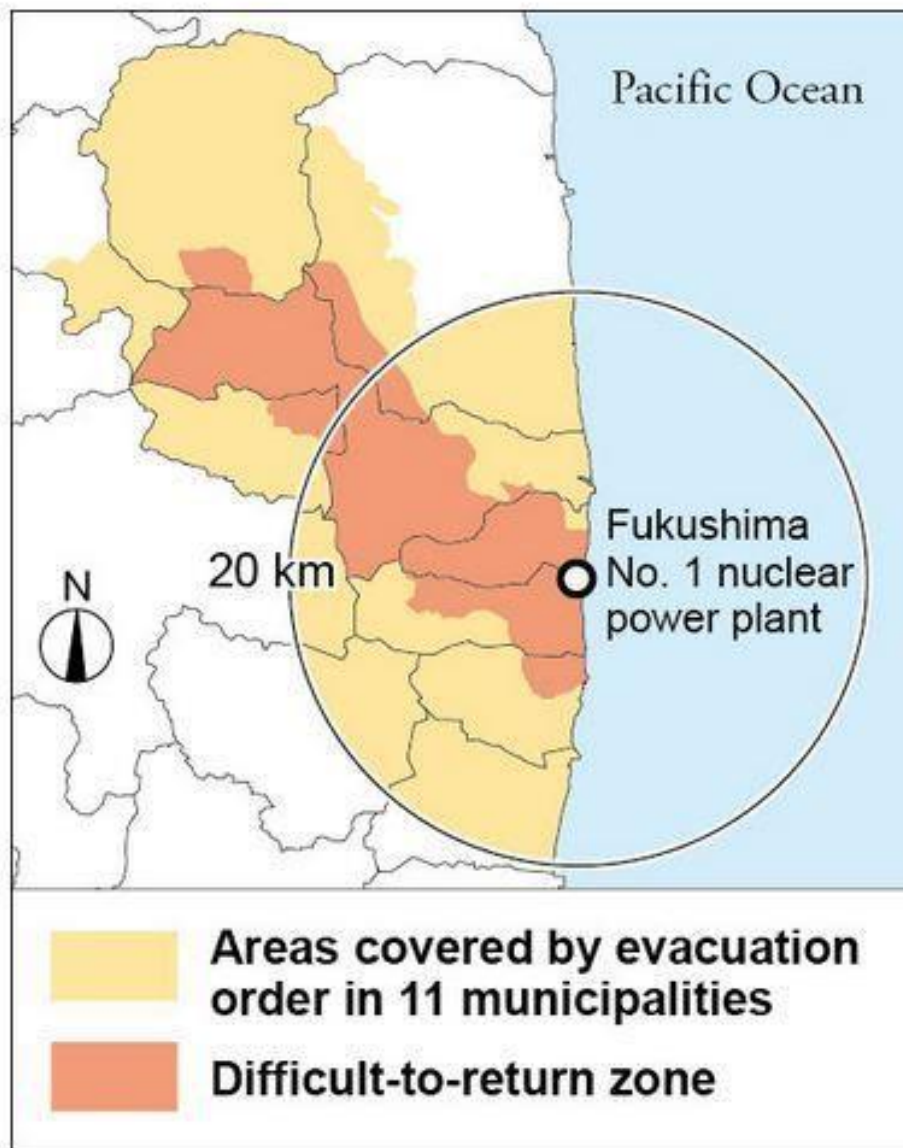
Decontamination?

March 27, 2017

SIX YEARS AFTER: Fukushima decontamination near-complete in evacuated areas

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201703270039.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN



Decontamination work in areas covered by the evacuation order from the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster is expected to conclude this month, paving the way for evacuees from the affected communities to return home.

With the project's completion, the government's focus will shift to the cleanup of heavily contaminated areas near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant and infrastructure building.

The areas covered in the Environment Ministry's decontamination project constitute those in 11 municipalities, including Okuma and Futaba, the two towns co-hosting the nuclear complex.

The decontamination project got under way there in fiscal 2012 to remove soil, fallen leaves and other materials contaminated by radioactive substances primarily in residential areas, roads, and rice paddies and fields.

But the areas collectively known as the difficult-to-return zone where annual radiation doses were estimated to exceed 50 millisieverts as of the end of 2011 and still estimated at more than 20 millisieverts five years after the disaster were excluded from the decontamination work in those 11 local governments. The cleanup in nine municipalities has already been completed, while the project in the remaining two is expected to finish this month, according to the government.

The completion of the project comes after the Cabinet approved a policy to finish decontamination by the end of March 2017 at a meeting in March 2016.

The evacuation order for Okuma and Futaba will remain in place even though the cleanup project will soon be over.

But the government expects to lift the order for people from the remaining nine municipalities, except for residents from the difficult-to-return zone, by April 1.

That will make the total area remaining under the evacuation order 30 percent of the size six years ago. According to the ministry, decontamination operations have been carried out in 99 local governments in and outside of Fukushima Prefecture, costing about 2.6 trillion yen (\$23.56 billion) over the past five years.

Although the government initially covers the costs of decontamination, it sends the bill to Tokyo Electric Power Co., the plant's operator.

Despite the cleanup project, many evacuees will likely remain anxious about radiation exposure when they return because forests and woods except for those close to residential areas have not been decontaminated.

The government envisages setting up hubs for rebuilding the difficult-to-return zone by carrying out an intensive cleanup to make the areas habitable by 2022.

(This story was written by Chikako Kawahara and Yu Kotsubo.)

Radiation fear & children

March 25, 2017

Radiation brings fear, and kids let it all out

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/03/25/national/media-national/radiation-brings-fear-kids-let/>
by Michael Hoffman

Radiation is a fearful thing. Colorless, odorless, undetectable except by special instruments, it's one of those evils you can dismiss from your mind altogether, until the special instruments start registering. Then suddenly it's everywhere, or seems to be — a ubiquitous and ineradicable contaminant.

Children, as we all know, say and do the damnedest things. They mean no harm, they just know not what they do, sometimes. Their innocence is terrifying. Sometimes innocence looks anything but innocent. But all societies recognize it.

Children are not legally responsible for their actions. Parents and teachers may punish them in order to teach them responsibility. But it's a long process. Until it's complete, the evil they do, when they do evil, gets filed under "mischief," in recognition of the spirit in which it was — probably — committed.

When Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant cracked under the strain of a tsunami six years ago and irradiated large swaths of Fukushima Prefecture, refugees streamed out of the stricken area, settling where they could. Forty thousand of them remain out-of-prefecture, 5,100 in Tokyo. Most of them will never go home again. Will they ever be at home where they are?

Josei Seven magazine raises the issue of "nuclear bullying." Children too young, one might think, to even know the word "radiation" picked it up under the circumstances, and flung it with what seems like gleeful malice at disoriented new classmates who had enough to cope with already. Six years on, says Josei Seven, they're still flinging it.

"It started immediately," says one refugee, recalling her son's transfer to a Tokyo elementary school in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. "'Fukushima kids are weird,' they'd shout at him. Kids would crawl under his desk and jab his feet with pencils. In the mornings he began saying he wasn't feeling well. At the time, frankly, I was too traumatized myself to take much notice."

Lawyer Yukio Yamakawa, director-general of the Tokyo Disaster Support Network, takes up the story with an account of other children he's spoken to. What starts with name-calling ("Hey, Radioactive!" "Hey, Bacteria!") easily escalates into what's hard not to call torture. One kid is forced to drink a bottle of ink. Another has his shoes tossed into the toilet. A third is met in the corridor by classmates poised as if brandishing guns: "Radiation! Bang! Bang!" A fourth suffers extortion of what adds up over time to ¥1.5 million: "You can afford it, your family gets (disaster victim) compensation payments!"

Yamakawa reports this taunt making the rounds: "Fukushima kids won't live past junior high school anyway, so you may as well die now."

"Tanaka-san," as we'll call the mother cited above, began to fear her son might commit suicide. A poem he wrote contained the line, "Oh, to be able to go to heaven." Fully focused now, she transferred the boy to another school. The peace that followed was short-lived. Name-calling, exclusion — it started all over again. The homeroom teacher was well-intentioned and put a stop to it — what she could see of it. What went on behind her back was beyond her control. A lot did, its viciousness increasing.

"I'd been bullied myself as a child," Tanaka says, incidentally reminding us that the problem is neither new nor necessarily nuclear-related. "I understood what he was going through."

She transferred him again. That seems to have ended the ugliest persecution, but, once a victim, you don't simply get over it. The boy as a small child had dreamed of being a botanist when he grew up. Now he simply says, "I have no dreams." Fukushima No. 1 destroyed much that is quantifiable — lives, property, livelihoods — and much that isn't.

What to make of little kids who inflict this torment on other little kids? Can innocence itself be evil? Or fictitious? One hypothesis Josei Seven raises is that children merely absorb what they hear from their parents. Lacking critical faculties and adult inhibitions, they act where grown-ups merely talk.

The energy and imagination they put into it make it hard not to suspect they enjoy it. Enjoyment of other people's sufferings is a well-attested human trait, exploited for mass entertainment at least as far back as the Roman circuses. Nothing has happened since to root it out of us, and if radiation stimulates it today, in that respect at least it breaks no new ground.

Naked fear is a factor too. Radiation, unseen, unheard, is the most fearful of stalkers. Might school kids seriously believe their Fukushima classmates are contagious? If so, the rational response would be to stay away from them, but fear and hatred merge, short-circuiting rationality and generating "Radiation, bang, bang!"

Radiation today, tuberculosis a century ago, different causes producing similar effects. Novelist Ayako Miura (1922-1999), herself a sufferer, made what might be called “tuberculosis bullying” a sub-theme of her novel “Shiokari Toge” (Shiokari Pass), set in late-19th-century Hokkaido: “It was an age when sufferers of tuberculosis were so hated and feared that they were even forced to leave the neighborhood.” A character who innocently brings up the subject arouses horror in his listener: “Mr. Nagano, even if you only mention the name of that dreadful disease it makes your lungs rot!”

“Radiation, bang, bang!” Last July a 26-year-old man slipped into a facility for disabled patients in Kanagawa Prefecture and slaughtered 19 of them, his apparent intention being to free the world from the scourge of disability. Disability, bang, bang. In February Satoshi Uematsu was declared fit to stand trial. A psychiatric evaluation found in him symptoms of a personality disorder but not of incapacity to distinguish right from wrong.

The disorder in question, writes psychiatrist Rika Kayama in the weekly *Spa!*, amounts to an extreme form of self-love. “Of course,” she writes, “we all love ourselves; we all at one time or another fantasize about being king or queen of the world ...” We’d all, in short, be insane, more or less, if we let our fantasies rule our actions. Most of us know when to stop.

Uematsu’s self-love, Kayama hypothesizes, took the form of a conviction of having a mission, a destiny to fulfill. Maybe we all have that too, to some degree. Adults usually stifle it. Children often don’t.

Symposium in Iitate

March 25, 2017

SYMPOSIUM: Locals, experts discuss radiation risks, solutions, future in Iitate

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201703250003.html>

By MASAKAZU HONDA/ Staff Writer

FUKUSHIMA--Even after six years, lingering concerns over radiation loom large over the lives of evacuees from a village in northeastern Tohoku ravaged by the Great East Japan Earthquake and nuclear disaster in 2011.

Residents have agonized over whether to return to their homes in the village of Iitate, one of the most heavily contaminated areas, since evacuation orders are to be lifted on March 31.

Masanobu Akaishizawa, 67, head of an administrative district of Iitate, expressed his concerns at a recent symposium held here in mid-February.

“Experts say radiation doses don't affect us as long as we stay home,” he said. “But I wonder about the quality of my life if I can neither go to the mountains nor the river.”

Iitate was in the direct path of radioactive materials that spewed from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co., following the triple meltdown due to the earthquake, tsunami as well as the government and TEPCO's shortcomings on March 11, 2011.

Ahead of the lifting of the evacuation order for most of the village of Iitate on March 31, researchers and journalists, who have conducted field surveys since immediately after the accident, shared their views on radiation effects on health and avoiding health risks with villagers at the symposium.

The symposium, titled "Think about the future of Iitate villagers," was hosted by the Iitate-mura Society for Radioecology, which comprises academics and citizens who committed themselves to continue their support for residents through their expertise.

During the session, Tetsuji Imanaka, a researcher at the Kyoto University Research Reactor Institute, estimated the annual average radiation exposure to residents if they immediately return to the area after the evacuation orders are lifted. He put the figure at approximately 5 millisieverts of radiation.

"How can residents come to terms with the health risks caused by radiation exposure? That's the issue," Imanaka said.

Katsumi Furitsu, a doctor at the Hyogo College of Medicine, highlighted the government's responsibility. Furitsu has conducted research in the areas devastated by the crippled Chernobyl nuclear plant in Ukraine, site of the world's worst nuclear accident in 1986.

"Low-dose radiation exposure also has health risks in accordance with the amount," Furitsu said.

"Offering appropriate health management and medical benefits (for the disaster victims who have been exposed to radiation) is the government's minimum responsibility just like it issued 'hibakusha' (A-bomb victims) health books in Hiroshima and Nagasaki," Furitsu emphasized.

Hibakusha health books have been awarded to those certified by the government as radiation victims of the 1945 atomic bombings, making them eligible for special health-care benefits, including allowing them access to free medical assistance.

Such a book could also become a powerful weapon to force the government to take responsibility for Fukushima evacuees for future damage to their health potentially related to radiation exposure.

Villagers expressed, however, concern that this could lead to possible future discrimination.

"We understand the necessity of issuing the radiation exposure record books to protect victim's health," said one resident. "But high school girls have fears and worries about possible future discrimination that is likely to be caused by possessing the books by posing such questions as, "Can we get married?" or "Can we have children?"

In response to those poignant voices from the disaster victims, Furitsu said, "In Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the same concerns were expressed. However, unjustified discrimination occurred not because of the health book, but because those who should take responsibility didn't take it."

"The government should take measures that help residents who had been burdened with unnecessary risks," Furitsu said, referring to such matters as providing health management, medical benefits, education and other activities to raise awareness of discrimination against disaster victims, especially if they have been exposed to low-dose radiation.

Yoshinobu Ito, 73, a farmer who moved to Iitate before the disaster, was especially worried about the risk radiation could have on children when they return to the village.

He released the results of measurements of radiation levels around his house that he has taken since the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

"Although the levels of radiation dose have dropped, they are still 10 times higher than the figures before the disaster. Even if I return to Iitate, rebuilding agriculture is a hardship," said Ito.

The effects of radiation also cast a shadow over Japanese cattle farmers such as Kiyomi Shigihara, 62, of Nagadoro in the southernmost section of Iitate. Nagadoro was designated as the only "difficult-to-return zone" in the village.

With regard to the government policy of decontaminating only reconstruction base areas and then lifting an evacuation order after five years, Shigihara said, "Under these circumstances, even if I return home, there's nothing I can do."

Unable to repress his emotions, Shigihara wiped tears from his eyes.

Evacuees ARE victims

March 26, 2017

Japan Political Pulse: The truth about Fukushima nuclear disaster compensation

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170326/p2a/00m/0na/003000c>

Of the unknown number of children who have been bullied for being from Fukushima Prefecture, where a nuclear disaster is still ongoing at a power station six years since its outbreak, one boy who evacuated to Yokohama was bullied and extorted by his classmates of 1.5 million yen in total.

Now in his first year of junior high school, the boy wrote when he was in sixth grade, "My classmates said, 'You get compensation, right?' That annoyed me, but I was frustrated with myself for not standing up against them."

Ironically, news reports say that because the family voluntarily evacuated from Fukushima Prefecture, they are not eligible for the high levels of compensation from the operator of the stricken nuclear plant, Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), that some victims are entitled to receive.

Those who evacuated from Fukushima Prefecture due to the nuclear crisis can be largely categorized into two groups. The first are those who were forced to leave their homes under evacuation orders from the central government, because they lived in areas where annual cumulative radiation levels exceeded 20 millisieverts, or otherwise faced extenuating circumstances as determined by the state. Such people receive a certain lump sum from TEPCO as compensation.

The second group comprises people who lived in areas with radiation levels that did not prompt government evacuation orders, but who evacuated voluntarily out of concern for the health of themselves and their children. As a general rule, these people are not eligible for compensation from TEPCO.

In the case of forced evacuations, TEPCO conducts individual interviews with evacuees to assess the value of their property and homes. But this is strictly to compensate for the assets that people have lost. What has often attracted attention but remains commonly misunderstood, is the monthly 100,000 yen per person that evacuees are said to be receiving as compensation for emotional suffering. Those who evacuated without orders to do so from the government are not eligible for this, either.

Meanwhile, the provision of compensation for emotional suffering to state-ordered evacuees whose homes are in areas where evacuation orders are set to be lifted will be stopped in March 2018. Whether or not such evacuees will return to their homes in Fukushima Prefecture once the no-go orders are lifted, they face the harsh reality that they will be cut off from government assistance. The government is rushing to rebuild infrastructure, and appeal to the world that they are lifting evacuation orders. But whether to return or to relocate is a difficult decision, especially for families with children.

People who evacuated from Fukushima Prefecture have not only been exposed to radiation, but to prejudice and misunderstanding regarding compensation that they may or may not have received. The false rumor that compensation recipients are enjoying the high life from compensation payments has spread. We can't deny that some probably indulged in the momentary influx of money and bought property or a fancy car. But because of that, the internet has been teeming with rumors that compensation recipients are tax thieves or calls for them to go back where they came from. And there's no doubt that

such a backdrop of **online defamation and scandalmongering** emboldened the children who bullied the boy in Yokohama.

The truth is, the family of the boy in Yokohama had evacuated Fukushima Prefecture voluntarily. They received a little over 1 million yen from TEPCO, but the parents said in an interview with an NHK new program, Close Up Gendai, that the money was put toward rebuilding their lives. Voluntary evacuees are exempt from paying rent due to the Disaster Relief Act, but many must restart new lives amid unstable finances.

The abovementioned boy moved to Yokohama with his family when he was in second grade. Shortly thereafter, classmates called him by his name, with the word for "germs" added on to the end. He soon found himself the victim of physical abuse such as hitting and kicking, and once he reached fifth grade, classmates demanded he give them money.

"I was so scared I didn't know what to do," the boy wrote. He stole from his parents and gave away a total of 1.5 million yen.

His parents, and other parents of children at the school who realized that something was going on, alerted the school. The school conducted an investigation, but took the bullies' claims that the boy had given them money willingly at face value, and did nothing to remedy the situation for two years.

I, too, only learned the truth about the case just recently, but I believe the school's misguided judgment was likely based on ignorance and prejudice toward compensation given to Fukushima Prefecture evacuees.

The boy's mother had been traveling back and forth between Yokohama and Fukushima. He knew how much his parents were struggling, so he remained silent about the bullying.

What moved the case into a new direction were notes the victim had written in the summer of sixth grade. A message calling on bullying victims not to kill themselves also written by the now first-year junior high school student who attends an alternative school, was also released to the public.

Compensation is given to some victims of the Fukushima nuclear disaster. But there is still too little compassion toward and understanding of the various misunderstandings, discrimination and divisions that disaster victims face. (By Takao Yamada, Special Senior Writer)

11 Fukushima municipalities still without evacuation routes

March 27, 2017

Some Fukushima municipalities lack nuclear evacuation plans as no-entry orders lifted

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170327/p2a/00m/0na/012000c>

Of the 11 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture which came under evacuation orders after the 2011 Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant meltdowns, five do not have evacuation plans in case a nuclear accident occurs again, even though no-entry orders are gradually being lifted.

- **【Related】** Evacuated Fukushima town planning for residents' return in fall 2017
- **【Related】** 40% of local leaders doubt 3.11 disaster area recovery by 2020 due to Fukushima crisis

- **【Related】** Radiation in Fukushima reactor containment vessel at deadly level: TEPCO

The central government requests local municipalities located near nuclear power plants to draw up evacuation plans in case of a nuclear emergency. According to central government policy, local governments should issue immediate evacuation orders to residents living within 5 kilometers of a plant in case of a "full-scale emergency" -- situations including the loss of cooling power at nuclear reactors. As a basic rule, those living between 5 and 30 kilometers from a plant are subject to indoor evacuation, and when a radiation dose of 20 microsieverts per hour is detected, evacuation should be completed within one week. Immediate evacuation is recommended when the dose hits 500 microsieverts per hour. A representative of the village of Katsurao, whose residents have started moving back, told the Mainichi Shimbun that the municipal government has not created its evacuation plan because "there are only two officials in charge of the matter." The official added, "We don't have expert knowledge (about nuclear evacuations) and we can't handle it with all the other work we have to do. Neither the state nor the Fukushima Prefectural Government is giving us advice."

An official from the village of Iitate, where the evacuation order will be lifted at the end of March, said in addition to a workforce shortage, "it's difficult to make a plan before examining how many residents will come back." The city of Tamura, whose residents have started coming back, and the towns of Futaba and Okuma, where it remains unknown when residents will be able to return, do not have evacuation plans. Meanwhile, the towns of Namie and Tomioka have mapped out their plans, which take the basic principle of evacuating all townspeople in case of a full-scale emergency -- more drastic measure than central government policy requires -- saying that just following the state's evacuation policy will not protect their residents' safety. Namie Mayor Tamotsu Baba told the Mainichi, "Residents don't believe they would be safe if they remain inside a building."

With regard to local evacuation plans, a support team for nuclear accident victims at the Cabinet Office points out that while such plans are not requirement for the state to lift evacuation orders, local governments should prepare disaster prevention measures.

The stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant is different from other nuclear stations in the country as decommissioning work is in progress for all its six reactors. At the same time, a rough road is expected for the project to remove melted fuel, and the estimated hourly radiation dose inside No. 2 reactor is as much as 650 sieverts.

According to an opinion poll by the Reconstruction Agency targeting residents of the city of Tamura, 61.5 percent of those who said they wanted to live in other municipalities than Tamura cited concerns over decommissioning work and management of the nuclear plant as reasons for not wanting to come back. Hirotada Hirose, professor emeritus at Tokyo Woman's Christian University and an expert in nuclear disaster prevention, commented, "The condition of melted nuclear fuel (at the Fukushima plant) is unknown and aftershocks are still continuing in Fukushima Prefecture. It's a problem that evacuation orders are being lifted while local governments have not come up with their evacuation plans."

New mall opens in Tomioka

March 30, 2017

Mall opens in Fukushima town near disaster-stricken nuclear plant

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170330/p2a/00m/0na/014000c>

Rice cakes are tossed to a crowd ahead of the full-scale opening of Sakura Mall Tomioka, a publically-established and privately-run mall, in Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture, on March 30, 2017. (Mainichi) TOMIOKA, Fukushima -- A shopping mall opened in this town near the disaster-stricken Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant on March 30, amidst hopes it will jumpstart the return of the populace as evacuation orders will be lifted for most of the town on April 1.

In addition to returning residents, the mall is expected to be used by employees working on decommissioning of the nuclear plant.

Before the nuclear disaster, Tomioka was considered to have the largest concentration of commercial facilities in Futaba County, which also hosts the nuclear plant. Together with the lifting of the evacuation orders, the town is touting its recovery as the "capital of the county."

The mall, called "Sakura Mall Tomioka," has around 4,500 square meters of floor space. In November last year, a home improvement store and three restaurants opened early, and on March 30 this year a supermarket and drugstore opened, bringing the facility into full operation. At a ceremony for the opening, Mayor Koichi Miyamoto said, "I am sure this mall will aid recovery (of areas affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake and Fukushima nuclear disaster)."

The Tomioka Municipal Government set up the mall by renovating buildings along National Route 6. The areas of the town with evacuation orders being lifted will cover 9,544 residents (based on March 1 population figures), but in the near term only a few percent of the population are expected to actually return to the town. Evacuation orders will remain in place for parts of the town with high radiation levels, called "difficult-to-return" zones.

More dental problems for elderly evacuees

March 29, 2017

Elderly disaster evacuees are at greater risk of losing their teeth

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201703290001.html>

By SHIGEKO SEGAWA/ Staff Writer

Elderly residents forced out of their homes by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster are at greater risk of dental problems than those who were not so badly affected, researchers say.

Stress, along with dietary changes and a lack of opportunities to brush teeth, are among the possible factors, according to a team from Tohoku University and other institutions.

The researchers surveyed 3,039 people aged 65 or older living in Iwanuma, Miyagi Prefecture.

Of the 2,332 respondents who answered all questions, a comparison was made of the state of their teeth in 2010, prior to the disaster, and in 2013.

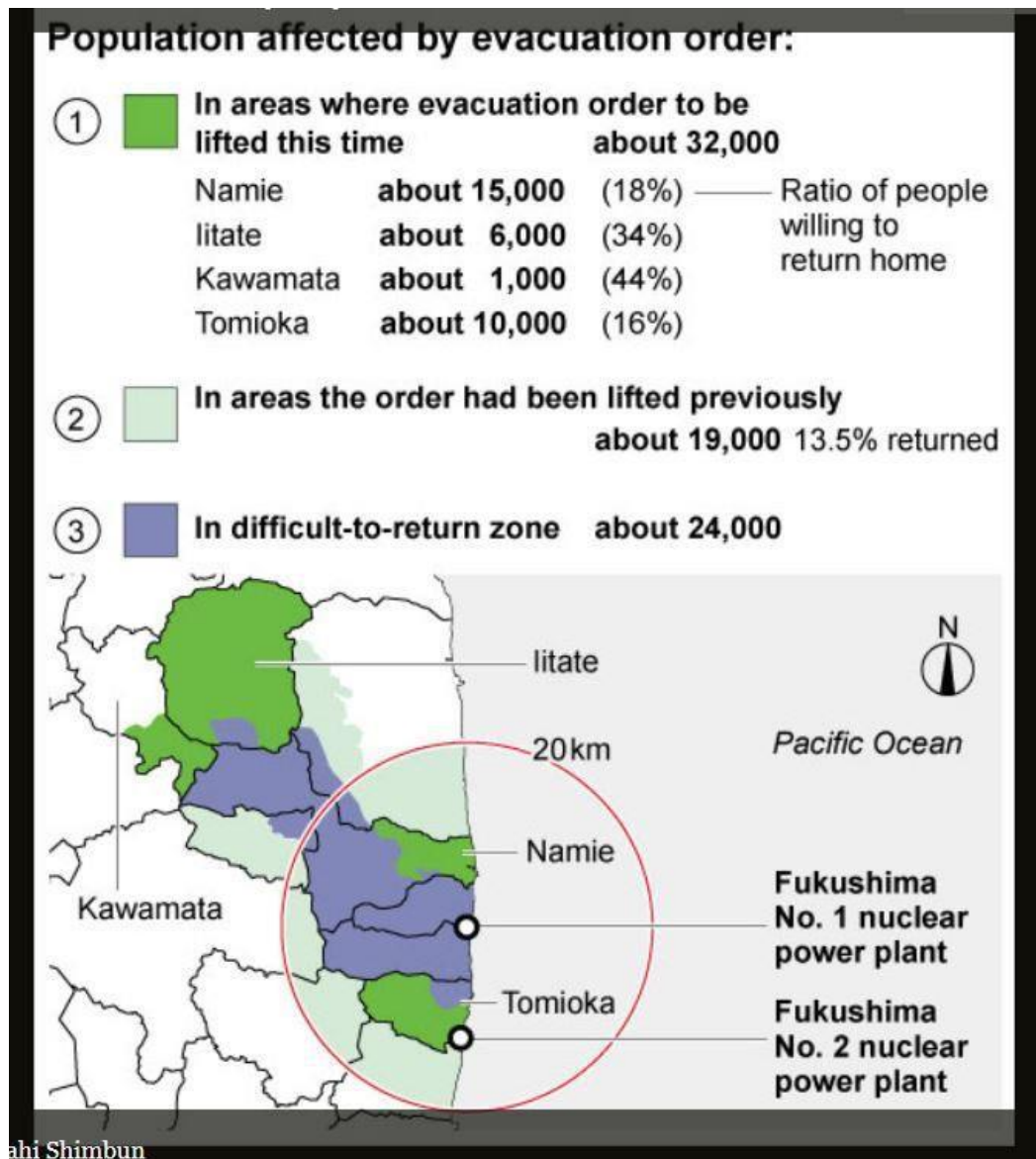
It found that 7.4 percent of the 1,805 respondents whose financial situation had not changed as a result of the disaster lost at least one tooth during the study period, whereas the corresponding ratio was 12.4 percent among the 145 subjects who said their financial state became tighter.

When age, income and other factors were taken into consideration, the worsening of an individual's financial situation because of the disaster was found to have increased the risk of losing teeth by 8 percent, the researchers said.

The survey found that disaster-affected people are vulnerable not only to depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health problems but also to a deterioration of dental health.

The researchers said possible preventive measures include distributing toothbrushes and setting aside tooth-brushing areas at evacuation centers.

How many will return home?



March 31, 2017

Most Fukushima evacuation orders end save for no-go zones

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201703310049.html>

By KENJI IZAWA/ Staff Writer

More than six years after the nuclear accident, evacuation orders for areas in two towns and one village in Fukushima Prefecture were lifted after midnight on March 30, allowing residents to finally return home. The number of residents affected tops 32,000, including the population of Tomioka, where the same order is scheduled to be lifted on April 1.

That will result in the government's evacuation order issued right after the March 2011 accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant being lifted for almost all affected areas, apart from highly contaminated areas designated as a "difficult-to-return zone."

However, less than 20 percent of people had returned to areas where the order had already been withdrawn earlier, and not many residents from areas close to the nuclear plants are willing to go back. On March 31, the order for parts of Namie and Kawamata towns and Iitate village was lifted.

In the coastal Ukedo district in Namie, about seven kilometers north of the No. 1 plant, about 30 people, including Namie residents and the town mayor, gathered at a memorial for the 182 victims from the town before the dawn, hours after the lifting of the evacuation order.

Just after 5:30 a.m., they held a minute of silent prayer.

"I would like to achieve complete recovery until the ban (on the difficult-to-return zone in the town) is lifted entirely for Namie, while cooperating with the residents," said Namie Mayor Tamotsu Baba.

In Namie, Iitate and Tomioka, the entire population had been living outside their homeland.

After the nuclear crisis unfolded, spawned by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, the government issued evacuation orders to 11 municipalities, for the total population of about 81,000.

Since then, one by one, the authority had lifted bans on areas that met certain safety criteria--estimated annual radiation doses totaling 20 millisieverts or less, and infrastructure and lifelines were reconstructed.

In Okuma and Futaba, where the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant is sited, the evacuation order remains in effect for all residents.

From now on, the government's priority will shift to encouraging evacuees' return and assisting them on becoming financially independent, while withdrawing in stages their compensation and accommodation payments.

In the government's fiscal 2017 budget, a fund of 23.6 billion yen (\$212 million) was set aside for restoring the local health-care system and facilities in the area impacted by the 2011 Great East Japan earthquake and tsunami, and nuclear crisis.

Restoring the essential services for living is part of the plan to encourage evacuees to return to their homes.

April 1, 2017

Evacuation order lifted for Fukushima town

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20170401_03/

The Japanese government has lifted the evacuation order for most parts of a town in Fukushima Prefecture. It was issued after the 2011 nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant.

The directive for Tomioka Town was lifted at midnight on Saturday in all areas except for no-entry zones with high radiation levels.

The town became the 9th municipality to be released from the order. The decree was initially imposed on 11 municipalities in the prefecture.

The government also withdrew the directives for some areas in Kawamata Town, Namie Town, and Iitate Village at midnight on Friday.

Areas still subject to the government evacuation order now make up 369 square kilometers. That is one-third of the initial size.

About 9,500 Tomioka residents are now allowed to return to their homes.

But in a survey conducted by the Reconstruction Agency and other institutions last year, only 16 percent of Tomioka's residents said they wanted to return to their hometown.

The town government had opened a shopping mall and a medical facility ahead of the lifting of the evacuation order.

In the future, it will be a challenge for the town to revive industries, decontaminate no-entry zones, and provide continued support for residents living outside the town.

Downturn attendance in Tohoku schools

April 3, 2017

3/11 disaster still exacting a heavy toll on schools in Tohoku region

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201704030057.html>

By HARUFUMI MORI/ Staff Writer

With the start of a new academic year, schools in areas of northeastern Japan devastated by the triple disaster brought on by the Great East Japan Earthquake 2011 are bracing for yet sharp downturn in attendance.

The number of children scheduled to attend publicly run elementary and junior high schools in coastal and surrounding municipalities of Iwate and Fukushima prefectures is down by almost 30 percent compared with before the catastrophe. The figure for Miyagi Prefecture is nearly 10 percent.

The Asahi Shimbun contacted 42 local authorities in those hardest-hit prefectures to gauge what the situation is like this year.

Destruction due to the tsunami generated by the magnitude-9.0 earthquake and unlivable conditions created by the related accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant caused an outflow of job opportunities, which accelerated dwindling population problems that cities and towns in the region had already been facing. The phenomenon could result in a shortage of manpower for reconstruction efforts in the future.

Schools in 12 municipalities of Iwate Prefecture will have 16,302 children enrolled this year, a decrease of 6,124, or 27.3 percent, from 2010.

The situation is especially serious in small municipalities in central and southern areas of the prefecture. For example, the town of Yamada is bracing for a 38.5-percent decrease, from 1,655 to 1,017. In the town of Otsuchi, the drop is 37.9 percent.

Miyagi Prefecture will experience an overall drop of 8 percent. Sendai, the prefectural capital, accounts for more than half of public school pupils and students. If Sendai is excluded, the overall figure will be a 15-percent decrease to 48,487 from 56,948.

In the town of Onagawa, which suffered greatly in the tsunami, the figure drops from 730 of 2010 to less than half.

In 15 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture, where evacuation orders were issued, the number of children will drop by 29 percent to 37,122 from the 2010 level.

The town of Namie, which had its evacuation order partially lifted on March 31, had 1,800 children enrolled in six elementary and three junior high schools before the quake. Of them, three town-run schools which were relocated to another town within the prefecture, will have a total of 13 students this April.

As attendance at elementary and junior high school nationwide usually decreases by around 1 percent each year, according to the basic survey of schools by Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, the decrease due to the disasters is quite significant.

The mission of Tomioka mayor

April 1, 2017

Tomioka mayor vows to reconstruct town

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20170401_11/

The mayor of a town in Fukushima Prefecture has vowed to restore it now that most of its territory has been removed from an evacuation order issued after the 2011 nuclear disaster.

Mayor Koichi Miyamoto spoke to reporters at the town hall on Saturday.

He said a new stage has begun in the efforts to restore the town. But he noted the evacuation order remains in effect for no-entry zones with high radiation levels.

He noted that cherry trees in the town are expected to bloom in a few days. He said he wants to be as strong as the cherry trees in pursuing his goal.

NHK video

<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/videos/20170405114444747/>

April 5, 2017

Fukushima dogs and masters reunite

"Permanent" temporary

April 2, 2017

Temporary disaster housing has an unforeseen permanence

by Philip Brasor and Masako Tsubuku

The 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake left 110,000 people in three prefectures without shelter. Most of these people moved into emergency evacuation centers while the authorities prepared temporary housing for them.

About 53,000 prefabricated housing units, called *kasetsu*, were built in accordance with a national law that covers emergency disaster housing. This law, enacted in 1947, states that residents will not stay in these units for more than two years. However, as the sixth anniversary of the disaster arrived on March 11, 35,000 people were still living in these makeshift apartments, the size of which, in accordance with the law, is limited to 30 square meters of floor area: Two 4.5-tatami-mat rooms, a small kitchen, one bathroom, and no dedicated storage area.

Last month, NHK aired a documentary about the people who were still living in *kasetsu* housing. Almost everyone said they hadn't expected to still be there. In many cases, these people owned homes that were destroyed in the disaster. Some also lost their land, since the tsunami that caused most of the destruction swept away soil. The work to reinforce the land and elevate it to a level that would be safer in the event of another tsunami has taken much longer than initially expected, and until the land is ready they cannot get on with their lives.

The vast majority of these remaining refugees are over 50 years old. NHK's survey of residents found that one in seven has no intention of rebuilding their old lives. A 75-year-old man living in a makeshift unit in Kamaishi, Iwate Prefecture, is shown watching preparations for the Tokyo Olympics on TV. He is waiting for his property to be restored by the local government so that he can build a new house on it, but the work being carried out is continually delayed and he doesn't know when it will be finished.

"They have deadlines," he says about the Olympic organizers, "so they get the priority." Construction materials and workers are at a premium right now in Japan, so rebuilding the Tohoku region has taken a back seat to finishing the Olympics. Meanwhile, the man's wife towels down the inside of their tiny, insulation-free *kasetsu* unit every three hours to get rid of condensation and mold.

NHK's underlying theme is how to improve the temporary housing situation in the event of future disasters, and that if the authorities have failed the victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake, much of

that failure has to do with the 1947 law. Sixty percent of local governments in the affected area say government regulations are the main obstacle to reconstruction. The size of the makeshift units and the length of stay, both of which are stipulated by law, are inappropriate, these officials say. As the mayor of Sendai told the NHK reporter, the law couldn't foresee "such a big disaster," which recalls the all-purpose excuse — also used by the nuclear power industry to justify its own lack of preparation for the Fukushima No. 1 meltdown — that the 9.0-magnitude temblor and accompanying tsunami could not be predicted. Following the Great Hanshin Earthquake of 1995, the government set up a panel to study the housing situation. The panel concluded that the law should be revised to take into consideration the way people live. The law only outlines the government's obligations up until the emergency housing stage; it says nothing about reconstruction or how victims are expected to get on with their lives afterwards. This is important, though, because evacuees represent a wide range of living circumstances.

The situation surrounding the 1995 quake was simpler, in a way. Because Kobe, the main municipality affected, is a major city, there was a paucity of available land on which to build *kasetsu*, so *minashi* were used for emergency housing. *Minashi*, which are stipulated in the disaster housing law, means existing vacant rental properties, which are paid for by the government. In Kobe, a relatively small area was destroyed, so evacuees who moved into *minashi* also didn't have to move far away. In Tohoku, makeshift housing was built in far-flung locations in the region, which meant victims moved far away from their homes, thus shattering communities.

Minashi will be an important consideration if a major disaster befalls Tokyo. According to NHK's simulation, if a 7.3-magnitude earthquake strikes the capital, 3.3 million residents in the 23 wards will require emergency shelter, or the equivalent of 570,000 *kasetsu* units. Like Kobe, and unlike the Tohoku region, there is not enough available land in Tokyo to accommodate that many makeshift houses, and NHK estimates only 80,000 can be built. The local government will have to commandeer vacant rental housing units. Coincidentally, right now there are 490,000 vacant rental housing units in the city and immediate surroundings, which is perfect.

But in order to use all those units, the law would have to be revised, because it currently limits the amount of money expended for rent for a family of five or more to ¥100,000 a month and for a family of four or less to ¥75,000 a month. Property values in Tokyo are higher than anywhere else in Japan. For ¥75,000 a month, the best you can get is a one-room apartment. There are not enough rental units in Tokyo that fall within the parameters set by the law, so the city would be short 180,000 housing units for evacuees. The law also doesn't consider the possibility that some victims are willing to pay the difference for a rental unit, so it is not allowed.

When NHK interviewed a representative of the Cabinet Office, which is in charge of such housing, he expressed no inclination to have the law changed any time soon, implying that the principle behind the disaster housing law is to discourage people from remaining indefinitely in emergency dwellings. This is why *kasetsu* are purposely cramped and uncomfortable and grants for rental housing are so low. The government is afraid that once they move in, people will not want to leave their emergency housing. That could be the case in *minashi* housing, but as far as the people living in *kasetsu* housing in Tohoku are concerned, they *do* want to leave. It's just that their circumstances — age, finances, whatever — prevent them from moving on. As one expert told NHK, the government must approach the disaster-housing issue in a "holistic" manner, by taking the long view toward reconstructing victims' lives. It's not enough to stick them in a closet and hope for the best.

Philip Brasor and Masako Tsubuku blog about Japanese housing at www.catforehead.wordpress.com.

Angry minister for reconstruction

April 5, 2017

3/11 'voluntary evacuees' are on their own, says angry minister

By NORIYOSHI OTSUKI/ Senior Staff Writer

The minister in charge of rebuilding Fukushima Prefecture after the 2011 nuclear disaster unfolded stormed out of a news conference after he faced repeated questions on the government's responsibilities to locals who choose not to return home.

Masahiro Imamura said that the central government is no longer responsible for those people from areas not under evacuation orders at the news conference on April 4.

When a journalist pressed Imamura on the issue, the minister snapped at him saying, "You are rude and should never come to another news conference," before pounding a desk, shouting "Shut up!" and abruptly leaving the Q&A session.

Imamura later apologized to reporters for becoming "emotional," but did not retract his earlier remark, saying he made an "objective statement."

Asked about the government's responsibility for providing assistance to the so-called voluntary evacuees at the news conference in Tokyo, Imamura said: "They are responsible for their lives. They can file a lawsuit or do other things (if they disagree with the central government's position)."

He added that the central government had done all it could to help, and that those who would not return to their homes in Fukushima Prefecture should take full responsibility for their actions.

Voluntary evacuees refer primarily to mothers and children from Fukushima Prefecture who fled to faraway regions even though they were not forced to evacuate.

The number of such people totaled 30,000 across Japan as of last October, according to the Fukushima prefectural government.

Concerns about their well-being have been mounting since the central and prefectural governments stopped funding free housing to those evacuees at the end of last month.

Support groups said the end of the free housing assistance could lead to a division among Fukushima people.

Locals who fled on a voluntary basis are eligible to receive limited support from the central government and compensation from Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, compared with their peers from the designated evacuation zone.

Abe in Fukushima

April 8, 2017

Abe visits Fukushima with Imamura, repeats pledge to back 3/11 reconstruction

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/04/08/national/politics-diplomacy/abe-visits-fukushima-imamura-repeats-pledge-back-311-reconstruction/>

JJI, Staff Report

NARAHA, FUKUSHIMA PREF. – Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Saturday renewed the government’s pledge to support Fukushima’s reconstruction as he paid a visit to see how the prefecture’s residents were getting along after the 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear crisis wrecked their lives.

In the morning, Abe visited a livestock farm in the town of Naraha, which was the first to resume shipping raw milk from areas hit with evacuation orders after the triple core meltdown at Tokyo Electric’s Fukushima No. 1 power plant.

“We want to support Fukushima’s efforts to dispel harmful rumors related to the nuclear accident and widen sales channels,” Abe said after sampling some local milk and yogurt.

He then went north to Tomioka, where he told a town gathering that the government will work together with the people of Fukushima to accelerate reconstruction.

In the afternoon, Abe visited the town of Namie, where all evacuation orders were lifted in March except in “difficult-to-return-to” zones with high radiation levels near the crippled plant.

He tasted young lancefish caught during fishing tests in waters where people voluntarily refrained from fishing.

Masahiro Imamura, the minister for disaster reconstruction, accompanied Abe on the trip.

After the Fukushima Prefectural Government terminated financial assistance for housing 26,000 so-called voluntary evacuees on March 31, Imamura came under fire last week for saying that those who cautiously opted to flee areas not designated for evacuation should take responsibility for their decisions. Many do not plan to return.

He withdrew the remarks on Friday.

Speaking to reporters in Minamisoma, Abe said, “The minister has already apologized and I also would like to give an apology.”

He added, “There has been no change in my Cabinet’s policy to promote reconstruction as we stay considerate of the feelings of the affected people.”

Imamura told reporters in Namie: “What is most important is to lift up local communities. I will work hard for that.”

Emergency snapshot

April 7, 2017

Trove of medical records snapshot of doctors’ plight after Fukushima

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201704070001.html>

TOMIOKA, Fukushima Prefecture--Hastily scribbled notes by overworked doctors paint a daunting picture of the challenges they and evacuees faced in the chaos of the Fukushima nuclear disaster that started in March 2011.

"Insulin, doses for two more days left. Not taking medication for blood pressure, from March 12," reads a doctor's report for a patient on March 17, six days after the disaster triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

The following day, the doctor wrote, "Which hospital is best?" as he pondered his options in referring a patient.

In another memo written March 17, a doctor appears stumped at the enormity of the challenge ahead: "Chronic diseases, heart failures etc. ... elderly and those needing a high degree of nursing care ... evacuees with all sorts of health problems are here! Patrolling, every corner of the facility."

This extraordinary record from the aftermath of the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant was published as a book March 23 by town authorities of Tomioka as they prepared for the April 1 lifting of the evacuation order issued for the coastal community just over six years ago.

Medical staff working at a makeshift clinic in a mass evacuation shelter set up inland in Koriyama that once housed more than 2,000 evacuees left 8,000 medical reports and log books in bundles.

The notes and memos were jotted down on whatever paper was available, instead of proper forms, and lay forgotten after the shelter closed six months later.

They offer a vivid record of the on-site emergency and the difficult decisions doctors were forced to make, and provide a valuable lesson for both medical service providers and people with medical problems: to be better prepared for a disaster in the future.

As the nuclear crisis unfolded, the government issued evacuation orders over several days. Chaos reigned at evacuation centers in the prefecture as Fukushima residents fled their homes to take refuge.

Big Pallet Fukushima in Koriyama, a complex of large exhibition and convention halls, was one such emergency shelter. At its peak, it housed about 2,300 evacuees. A large portion were residents of Tomioka, located a few kilometers south of the stricken nuclear plant.

The makeshift clinic at the shelter was mainly run by doctors who had also evacuated from the town.

On especially busy days, 200 or so patients waited patiently to see a doctor. The clinic operated until the shelter closed in August 2011.

The memos, medical records and staff log left by the medical staff were spotted by Keizo Kawamata, 44, a visiting researcher for arts at Ibaraki University, in 2012 in a clinic that had opened at a temporary housing settlement for Tomioka residents.

The records show that one in three patients who visited the temporary clinic were aged 65 or older. There were almost 400 people taking medication for high blood pressure or diabetes, but only 12 of them fled their homes with their "medication record" booklets. This is a small notebook used by pharmacies that list the names of prescription drugs that patients are taking. The government has been encouraging people to keep a record book to avoid unexpected drug interaction.

Without them, or proper medical records kept at hospitals and clinics, doctors had difficulties deciding what to prescribe, and what treatment patients should receive.

On the other hand, there were many instances where Tomioka residents were able to see their family doctors, as they, too, were at the shelter. As a result, their consultations were processed more easily than others.

"Taking pictures of prescription drugs or the list in the medication book with a mobile phone camera would come handy in times of emergency," Kawamata suggested as one way to keep personal medical records at hand. "Having family doctors is also important."

The Tomioka government decided to compile the records and publish them in book form, while personal details in the notes were edited out so individuals cannot be identified.

The evacuation order for Tomioka will be lifted on April 1, apart from parts of the town that are still highly contaminated.

The book will be available at government buildings and libraries.

Returning to their home school

April 7, 2017

Fukushima kids return to home school 6 years after disaster

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201704070031.html>

By YOSUKE FUKUDOME/ Staff Writer

MINAMI-SOMA, Fukushima Prefecture--Although much smaller in number, Odaka district's first-graders could finally celebrate their entrance ceremony in their home school on April 6 for the first time since the 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster.

The evacuation order for the district, located within 20 kilometers from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, had been lifted in July 2016.

At the ceremony, four female first-graders entered the Odaka Elementary School gymnasium, led by sixth-graders holding their hands.

"Since we will return to Odaka in the future, I had her enrolled in the school," said Naoto Hanazato, 47, father of Juria Hanazato, who will commute to the school from their evacuation residence. "It is a pity for her if she had to move later in the middle of the school year."

After the disaster, students in the four elementary schools in the Odaka district continued taking classes at a prefabricated school building, which was set up on the grounds of the junior high school in the city's north side from April 2013 to March 2017. The four are Odaka, Fukuura, Kanabusa and Hatsupara elementary schools.

From this fiscal year, they returned to Odaka Elementary School's decontaminated and renovated building.

The total number of students from the four schools is 62, less than 10 percent of the number before the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami hit on March 11, 2011, triggering the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Imamura apologises

April 7, 2017

Rebuild minister says sorry as 28,000 demand his resignation

By NORIYOSHI OTSUKI/ Senior Staff Writer

Under-fire minister Masahiro Imamura apologized and mostly retracted the remarks he made over so-called voluntary evacuees at a tense April 4 news conference in Tokyo, as thousands of protesters demanded his resignation.

Imamura, who is in charge of rebuilding from the Fukushima nuclear disaster, offered the late apology on April 6 after facing fierce criticism from Fukushima evacuees and political rivals.

The same day, four Fukushima evacuees' groups and their supporters jointly submitted a petition with 28,127 signatures to the Reconstruction Agency in the capital, calling for Imamura's resignation as the head of the agency.

When asked about the government's responsibility for providing assistance to the voluntary evacuees at the news conference, Imamura had said: "They are responsible for their lives. They can file a lawsuit or do other things (if they disagree with the central government's position)." He also shouted at a freelance journalist who pressed him on the issue

He apologized for his outburst to reporters on the evening of April 4, but did not retract his remarks, saying he had made an "objective statement."

However, Imamura made a U-turn on the morning of April 6 and offered his "sincere apologies" for his words on voluntary evacuees at a meeting for the Lower House's Special Committee for Reconstruction after the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Imamura asked permission to speak at the beginning of the meeting, and offered a further apology to the freelance journalist he had snapped at and for becoming "emotional" at the news conference, and then explained the other remarks that landed him in hot water.

"'Their own responsibility' was not the right way of saying it," the minister said. "I meant to say that they have made their own judgment (not to return)."

Addressing his remark suggesting that evacuees can take legal action if they are unhappy with the government's decision on the matter, he explained that he was merely "generally speaking" that "asking a court's decision is an option when an agreement cannot be reached (between two parties)."

Protests against Imamura by Fukushima evacuees began in front of the Reconstruction Agency building on April 5.

The letter accompanying the petition handed on April 6 read, "His remark suggested the nation is renouncing responsibility (to help evacuees), and trampled on evacuees' feelings."

Referring to a law passed to support all nuclear disaster victims, the letter continued, "As the minister of the agency responsible, we must question his quality."

A law has been enacted to support the lives of children and other victims of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant accident regardless of the decisions that victims make about their own futures, such as whether to move permanently or temporarily, or return to their homes in the affected area.

Asked by an opposition party member for his position on the resignation demand, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe gave Imamura his backing.

"I would like him to keep working hard for the speedy rebuilding of the disaster-hit area," Abe said at the Lower House plenary session on April 6.

Liberalization not so popular with people

April 8, 2017

Only 5.5% of households changed power companies after electricity market's liberalization in 2016

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/04/08/business/corporate-business/5-5-households-changed-power-companies-electricity-markets-liberalization-2016/>

Only 5.5 percent of households switched to new electricity suppliers after Japan's retail power market was liberalized in April 2016, industry data shows.

As of the end of March, the number of households that had applied to change power suppliers totaled 3,427,900, or 5.5 percent of all households with electricity contracts.

The ratio was higher in urban regions where competition is stiffer.

At the national level, moves to ditch traditional power companies for new entrants haven't gained much momentum yet.

In the Tokyo metropolitan area, 1.81 million customers, or 7.9 percent, abandoned Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc., the highest ratio of all regions. Some 700,000 households switched to Tokyo Gas Co. for the electricity.

In and around Osaka Prefecture, about 720,000 households, or 7.2 percent of the total, dropped Kansai Electric Power Co. for another utility.

In other regions, the defection ratios were lower at about one to two percent. These include the areas served by Tohoku Electric Power Co. Hokuriku Electric Power Co., Chugoku Electric Power Co. and Shikoku Electric Power Co.

Power bills, however, did not fall substantially except in urban regions. The nationwide average of the differences in the monthly rates for an average household was estimated at less than ¥250 in September. "Competition is unlikely to intensify very much over the coming year or two, except in some of the big-city areas," S&P Global Ratings Japan Inc. analyst Hiroki Shibata said. "Prices are unlikely to fall markedly." New entrants procure electricity mainly from other companies because they do not have large-scale power plants. Industry people say it is important to make wholesale electricity trading active so industry players can buy power at lower costs.

First cases of bullying of Fukushima evacuees only tip of iceberg?

April 11, 2017

Survey: 204 bullying cases of Fukushima evacuees

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20170411_17/

A survey by Japan's education ministry has found more than 200 cases of bullying involving children who fled Fukushima Prefecture after the nuclear disaster in March 2011. But the survey attributes fewer than 10 percent of these cases to the accident, prompting the education minister to admit the need for further studies.

The ministry surveyed more than 11,800 school-age evacuees through regional education boards in March.

The results show 204 cases of bullying occurred since April 2011. One pupil was told to go back to Fukushima soon after entering elementary school. Classmates also told a junior high school student to stay away because radiation is contagious. But the ministry's survey linked only 13 of the bullying cases to the nuclear accident.

In comparison, a recent NHK survey of more than 740 families showed that at least 54 children were bullied because they were "nuclear accident evacuees."

Education Minister Hirokazu Matsuno said on Tuesday that the ministry will consider additional studies to bring hidden cases to light. He said that if children were bullied because they were nuclear evacuees, they might have found it difficult to respond to the survey.

Professor Naoki Ogi of Hosei University said the failure of teachers to take the effect of the nuclear accident sufficiently into account has resulted in an extremely superficial appraisal of the problem.

Survey on Fukushima-linked bullying reveals hundreds more cases

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170411/p2g/00m/0dm/063000c>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- A government survey prompted by the bullying of a boy from Fukushima Prefecture has unveiled hundreds more cases in which evacuees from areas hit by the nuclear crisis were targeted, data released Tuesday showed.

The first nationwide survey on bullying of children who evacuated Fukushima Prefecture due to meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant in 2011 showed there were 129 cases in fiscal 2016 ended this March and 199 more cases in previous years.

Among the total, 13 had apparent links to the nuclear disaster or the major earthquake and tsunami that triggered it.

Education minister Hirokazu Matsuno indicated there could be other cases that may have gone undetected, saying, "It is difficult to conduct a survey that covers them all."

"We will consider our response in light of the possibility that (some) bullying has not surfaced," said Matsuno.

The latest survey targeting roughly 12,000 evacuees showed some of those who were bullied in relation to the nuclear crisis were told to go back to Fukushima or stay away, as they would contaminate others with radiation.

The incidents included the highlighted case in which classmates of a boy who relocated to Yokohama in Kanagawa Prefecture demanded he give them cash, and called him a "germ."

After the case in Yokohama surfaced in November, a slew of similar incidents were brought to light in other parts of the country, prompting the government to request schools that accept evacuees check whether they have been bullied or not through interviews and other means.

See also : <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/04/11/national/social-issues/survey-finds-bullying-young-fukushima-evacuees-schools/>

Born on 3/11

April 11, 2017

How 3/11 shaped the lives of three children now going to school

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201704110052.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Kenjo Uchimi, Junki Kikuchi and Sakura Shimosawa were born in different parts of northeastern Japan but have one thing in common.

They arrived in this world on March 11, 2011, the day of the earthquake and tsunami disaster that left nearly 20,000 people dead or missing in the Tohoku region.

Like other children born that day, they are now 6 years old and started attending elementary school from this spring.

The lives of these three children were dramatically affected by the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake and towering tsunami that devastated coastal areas and triggered a nuclear disaster in Fukushima Prefecture.

As Rieko Uchimi was delivering her son in Rifu, Miyagi Prefecture, the hospital was plunged into a blackout and water supplies were cut off.

Kenjo was delivered through Caesarean section, but a lack of oxygen left him with a physical impairment due to brain paralysis.

In the case of Junki Kikuchi, a lack of nurses at a hospital in Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture, meant that Junki, instead of being put in a room for the newborn, spent every hour in bed with his mother Sanae, 40. The unfolding disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant caused by the triple meltdown would also play havoc with his life.

Because the family stayed on in Koriyama, rather than evacuating like other residents in the neighborhood, Junki could never play outside as the risk of radiation exposure was too great.

Sakura Shimosawa was born in Miyako, Iwate Prefecture, but infant incubators at the hospital became unusable because of a blackout. Her mother Etsuko, fearing a tsunami, fled to the third floor of the hospital, the highest level, for protection, clutching her newborn daughter in a blanket during the freezing night.

SUPPORT NETWORK

Kenjo Uchimi is unable to move his hands or legs freely. He also has difficulty speaking.

On April 10, the day before the entrance ceremony of Rifu Elementary School, Kenjo's mother and father, Takashi, 43, took him to the school so he could see his classroom.

Finding a desk on which his name tag was pasted, Kenjo sat on the chair. Then, a teacher and the father said in unison, "Cool." Kenjo sported a big grin.

His mother Rieko, 42, was driven by her husband to an obstetrics and gynecology hospital in Rifu as clocks ticked over from March 10, 2011, to March 11. It was a fraught delivery.

When Kenjo was 2 years old, he began attending a center that helps children's growth. He uttered sounds and tried to climb onto a balance beam while crawling.

"Kenjo is motivated to grow. He should go to a nursery school," a staff member told Takashi.

At the nursery school, staff were always on hand to help Kenjo.

One day, an infant who had yet to reach the age of one was climbing stairs while crawling. A nurse asked Kenjo, "Will you try that?" Slowly, he climbed the stairs one by one. After negotiating all 22 steps, he flashed a big smile and gave out a cry of delight at his achievement.

His friends always huddled around him, making sure he had a chair for morning meetings and turning on the faucet when Kenjo needed to wash his hands. He eventually became able to say, "A-ri-ga-to-u" (Thank you).

Now, he can move around with a walker. He can also eat by himself with a spoon and fork.

"Friendship and affection from other people encourage him. We (our family) were able to learn that,"

Takashi said, adding, "Though he may suffer setbacks in the elementary school, he will surely be able to overcome them."

THE KARATE KID

In Koriyama, Junki Kikuchi entered Tomita-Higashi Elementary School on April 6.

Influenced by his elder brother, Hiyuki, 9, Junki began to learn "karate" when he was 4 years old. He attends a dojo training hall two or three times a week.

Junki was born at a hospital in Koriyama two hours before the Great East Japan Earthquake. Like other newborns, he should have spent his first days of life in a special room for infants. But there was a shortage of nurses, and he slept with his mother.

Although the nuclear accident was unfolding, Junki's family decided to remain in Koriyama rather than evacuate.

Unable to play outdoors, Junki had a stressful time, which caused his mother great pain.

Now, six years have passed.

"Though he may be smaller than other children in his class, he has become an active boy. Now, he climbs one of the pillars in our home," said Sanae.

"The anxieties we felt at the time of the nuclear accident are becoming a thing of the past. We are happy with that," Junki's father, Ryuichi, 38, added.

OLDEST OF 3

In Miyako, Sakura Shimosawa politely wrote her name on a notebook, saying, "I am now able to write my name."

She also wrote, "I like Japanese and math. I want to learn (hiragana and other) characters as early as possible."

Sakura smiled as she showed off a pale purple "randoseru" satchel her mother Etsuko, 38, bought for her. Sakura was born 27 minutes before the Great East Japan Earthquake struck. Infant incubators were rendered useless due to a power blackout. Etsuko fled to the top floor of the hospital, praying they would survive the tsunami.

Sakura now has a 4-year-old sister and a 1-year-old brother. As an elder sister, she puts them to sleep. She also helps her mother in cooking. She cuts "tofu" bean curd for miso soup and peels potatoes.

Sakura was born two weeks prematurely.

"It looks as if she was determined to be born on March 11 from the outset," Etsuko said.

"(As I gave birth to her on the day when many people died) I feel that Sakura is encouraged to become a person who offers a helping hand to people in trouble."

As Sakura was born at a cold time of year, her parents named her Sakura (cherry blossoms, which are a symbol of spring), hoping that she would spread warmth to those around her as she grew.

When her name was called by her teacher during the entrance ceremony of Sentoku Elementary School on April 10, Sakura replied with a strong "Yes," which echoed in the gymnasium where the ceremony was being held.

(This article was written by Norihiko Kuwabara, Hiroki Koizumi and Hiroaki Abe.)

"Voluntary" evacuees

April 13, 2017

As I See It: Support for 'voluntary evacuees' insufficient but not too late to start

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170413/p2a/00m/0na/012000c>

So-called "voluntary evacuees" who fled Fukushima Prefecture due to the ongoing nuclear crisis were cut off from free housing services at the end of March.

- **【Related】** Voluntary nuclear evacuees to face housing assistance gap
- **【Related】** Reconstruction minister under fire over no responsibility for 'voluntary evacuees' remarks
- **【Related】** Editorial: Reconstruction minister unfit for his position

Since last fall, I have been reporting on the issue of termination of free housing for "voluntary evacuees" -- those who evacuated from Fukushima Prefecture out of radiation concerns, even though their places of residence did not come under the government's evacuation orders -- and have met many evacuees who faced termination amid straitened circumstances and with no prospects of living independently.

Six years have passed since the outbreak of the nuclear disaster, and I believe that insufficient assistance provided by the central government, the Fukushima Prefectural Government, and the municipalities to which Fukushima Prefecture residents evacuated led to the current state of affairs.

Following the onset of the nuclear crisis at Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant in March 2011, some Fukushima Prefecture residents who did not live in areas designated by the central government as no-go zones "voluntarily" evacuated to other areas of Fukushima Prefecture and beyond. The Fukushima Prefectural Government regarded the homes such evacuees chose to live in as "temporary housing" provided to victims of disasters, and covered their rent. Unlike evacuees from areas designated as no-go zones, most "voluntary evacuees" have not been eligible for compensation from Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the operator of the stricken Fukushima nuclear plant, leaving payment for housing from the Fukushima Prefectural Government as the only assistance such evacuees received. In June of 2015, however, the prefectural government announced that it would be terminating such assistance at the end of March 2017, saying that "an environment for leading everyday life in Fukushima is in the process of coming together."

Radiation levels in Fukushima Prefecture dropped significantly shortly after the outbreak of the disaster, and in some areas, radiation levels are not much different from those in the Kansai region, where I live. However, many former Fukushima prefectural residents are still concerned with radiation, and among some families, children do not want to move back to Fukushima because they've made friends where they live now. As of October 2016, there were approximately 10,000 households of "voluntary evacuees" from Fukushima Prefecture. This spring, many of those households were faced with the difficult question of whether to move back to their hometowns, or pay out of pocket in order to continue life where they are. What I took from reporting on the issue is the polarization of "voluntary evacuees." Those who have been able to adapt to life where they've evacuated to and rebuild their lives said they wanted to leave behind their status as "evacuees." Some even said they'd become leaders of neighborhood community associations.

Meanwhile, others said they couldn't sleep at night because they were unable to find affordable housing, or that they didn't have the funds to move. Among the latter were those with family members who have disabilities, or members who are from other countries and do not speak Japanese well -- in other words, families who were vulnerable even before the outbreak of the nuclear disaster. I learned of cases in which people's lives turned for the worse after they evacuated. For example, there have been cases of divorce that resulted after mothers evacuated with their children, leaving the father behind. Meanwhile, other evacuees developed mental illness or suffered strokes. Such evacuees needed assistance that was finely tuned to their individual needs in the areas of employment, medical care and education. However, there were many instances in which I felt they were not receiving sufficient care.

A 57-year-old man who "voluntarily" evacuated from the city of Fukushima to an Osaka municipal residence, remained isolated in a corner of the massive city for 4 1/2 years after the outbreak of the disaster. The man has a visual impairment that has qualified him for level-1 physical disability certification. He is not completely blind, but to read documents, he must step out onto the veranda for natural light and use a magnifying glass. With his disability, it is nerve-racking for him to go out alone in an unfamiliar city. His South Korean-born wife, 62, who helps him with his everyday life, does not read or write Japanese well. Because of this, he rarely obtained information from documents that were delivered to him from administrative offices or support organizations.

He thus remained unable to receive assistance, and was bogged down by debt that he incurred from moving and purchasing household furnishings. He didn't even learn about the termination of free housing until six months after the Fukushima Prefectural Government made the announcement. Subsequently, based on the advice of a supporter who visited him at his home, he transferred his residency registration to the city of Osaka, and began receiving the city's support services. However, he still has mixed feelings toward administrative agencies. "They had to have known about my visual disability. Whether it be the Fukushima Municipal Government or the Osaka Municipal Government, if someone had made the effort to inform me, I wouldn't have had to suffer as much as I did," he said.

In fiscal 2016, the Fukushima Prefectural Government and the municipalities to which Fukushima prefectural residents evacuated made individual visits to "voluntary evacuees." They should have made the visits an opportunity not only to listen to residents' concerns about housing after they were cut off, but also to help map out plans for households under straitened circumstances to become independent. But that was not necessarily the case.

A woman in her 50s who, with her child, evacuated from the Fukushima Prefecture city of Koriyama to a Tokyo public housing complex, was emotionally beaten down after constantly being reminded by housing management that she and her child were to leave by the end of the 2016 fiscal year. The woman said that she was even told that she could be hit with a lawsuit if she did not move out of the building.

The dedication with which local governments took the effort to visit evacuees differed from municipality to municipality, and at least one municipal government did not send staff to visit evacuees until three months before the free housing service was brought to an end. To make matters worse, many municipal governments were sending staff not from their welfare departments, but from their public housing departments to make the visits. Under such circumstances, criticism against municipal governments for lacking a commitment to provide comprehensive support to evacuees is hard to refute.

Another thing that caught my attention as I covered this issue is that a large number of evacuees are apprehensive about going on public assistance. A mother and child who evacuated to the city of Osaka declined advice to apply for welfare. They said they did not want to become a burden to the state, and eked out a living on an 80,000-yen monthly income. However, public assistance exists precisely for people like this family. Municipalities that have dispatched staff to make individual visits to evacuee households, and are abreast of which households are in dire straits, should actively try to dispel misperceptions and prejudice about welfare, and help those people receive the assistance they need.

I believe that the evacuees' original municipalities of residence and the municipalities to which they evacuated are both responsible for the fact that they were unable to receive sufficient support before free housing was shut down. The Fukushima Prefectural Government assumed that the provision of housing assistance would suffice, while municipalities to which the residents evacuated had a latent notion that the evacuees weren't "real" residents of the municipality.

It's not too late, though. Both parties should collaborate and commit to closely assisting those facing grave hardships achieve self-reliance. (By Akira Okubo, Osaka Science & Environment News Department)

Not wanted: 46 million dollars in subsidies to create jobs for locals

April 13, 2017

Firms give up inroads to 2011 disaster areas

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20170413_06/

Japan's Board of Audit has found that **nearly half of the firms that were granted state subsidies in exchange for making inroads into areas hit by the 2011 disaster have given up their efforts.**

The Japanese government earmarked up to **nearly 46 million dollars in subsidies** to companies that will be building factories and other facilities in the prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima.

They were worst-hit by the earthquake and tsunami 6 years ago. Fukushima also suffered the after-effects of a nuclear disaster.

The scheme seeks to create jobs for local residents.

The Board of Audit studied the situation as of March 2016. It learned that 232 firms, accounting for 45 percent of the companies that were granted subsidies, had ultimately backed off from their plan.

Officials say **in many cases, the firms were unable to secure land or a workforce due to the slow pace of recovery.**

In tsunami-hit cities, including Kesennuma, Miyagi Prefecture, and Miyako, Iwate Prefecture, more than 70 percent of the firms declined the offer.

As a result, **the opportunity to create more than 2,700 jobs has gone unrealized.**

Industry ministry officials who are in charge of the subsidy program have expressed disappointment.

They say they will examine the plans of firms that apply for grants more carefully to make sure the money will not go unspent.

Materials for ethics education

April 17, 2017

EDITORIAL: Children must learn respect for Fukushima evacuees

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201704170027.html>

Many children of families who have fled Fukushima Prefecture after the 2011 nuclear disaster have become targets of bullying at school.

The education ministry said on April 11 that a total of 129 cases of school bullying in which children from Fukushima were victims have been confirmed over the past fiscal year.

Only four have been formally recognized as cases linked directly to the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami and the consequent catastrophic accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. But the ministry said it has not tracked down all bullying cases involving Fukushima evacuees.

The confirmed cases are, of course, the tip of the iceberg.

In some past cases, the victims suffered various forms of verbal abuse.

“The nuclear plant exploded because of people like you,” is one example of verbal harassment hurled at a bullying victim. “Don’t come close to me. I don’t want to get contaminated with radiation,” is another.

These harrowing stories of bullying are reminiscent of the high-profile harassment case involving a boy who moved from Fukushima to Yokohama with his family after the accident. In that case, which made headlines in the media last autumn, the boy stopped attending classes.

“Behind the problem is a lack of understanding about radiation and the situations of evacuees,” said education minister Hirokazu Matsuno.

Children tend to be influenced by the words and attitudes of adults around them. The problem of rampant bullying of Fukushima evacuees reflects a lack of understanding among adults about the plight of these people.

But some Cabinet members have also made remarks that hurt the feelings of people in Fukushima Prefecture.

Masahiro Imamura, the minister in charge of rebuilding areas affected by the nuclear accident, for example, recently said so-called “voluntary evacuees,” or people who have fled areas not subject to evacuation orders, are “responsible for their lives.”

Nobuteru Ishihara, speaking about where to store contaminated soil from the crippled nuclear plant, said, "In the end, it will come down to money."

Tamayo Marukawa, while voicing skepticism about the government's goal for lowering radiation levels around the plant, said, "There are people who express anxiety no matter how much (radiation levels) are lowered, people who can be called the 'anti-radiation' crowd, if I may use an unusual term."

Both made these remarks while serving as environment minister.

The government seems to be betting that an increase in the number of Fukushima evacuees who return home will help the reconstruction of the prefecture make progress, or at least make it look as if progress is being made.

The government's desire and efforts to see that happen may be making Fukushima evacuees not returning home feel small.

If a lack of understanding is the cause of bullying of children from Fukushima, adults have the responsibility to give children opportunities to learn and think about the reality.

Collections of materials for ethics education compiled by the Fukushima prefectural board of education may help. Different versions designed for classes at elementary, junior and senior high schools are now available and can be obtained from the education board's website.

The collections include materials based on real stories concerning such serious topics as the feelings of local residents who were forced to leave their homes, discrimination driven by fears of radiation and unfounded prejudice against agricultural products grown in Fukushima.

Reports and documentaries describing the lives of evacuees and the realities of Fukushima can also be used as teaching materials.

These topics and issues can also be dealt with along with those related to radiation in comprehensive learning or contemporary social studies classes.

People in Fukushima have made different decisions on such vital questions as whether they should leave their communities or stay and whether they should return home to make a fresh start or rebuild their lives where they are living now. That's because there is no simple answer to these questions.

"We hope children will have honest discussions, recognize that they may disagree on some issues and learn to get along while respecting one another," says a Fukushima prefectural board of education member.

The problem of bullying of Fukushima evacuees should be taken as a good opportunity for educators to tackle the challenge of offering classes designed to **encourage children to think on their own instead of instilling ideas and views into them.**

--The Asahi Shimbun, April 16

Cherry blossoms but nobody to see them



A couple who temporarily returned to their house in Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture, take photos of cherry blossoms in the town's Yonomori district on April 17. (Yosuke Fukudome)

Crowds absent as Fukushima town's blossoms reach their peak

By YOSUKE FUKUDOME/ Staff Writer

Cherry blossoms are at their peak in the Yonomori district of Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture. Most of the flowers there are located in a difficult-to-return zone. (Video taken by Yosuke Fukudome)

TOMIOKA, Fukushima Prefecture--Cherry blossoms are now at their peak in the Yonomori district here, but revelers of "hanami" viewing parties are notably absent from this once-popular sightseeing spot.

"Someiyoshino" cherry blossom trees line a 2.2-kilometer section of the road, but most of it is deserted.

Only a 300-meter stretch in the southernmost part is located in an area that has had its evacuation order lifted on April 1.

The remaining portion is situated in a difficult-to-return zone. People who lived there before the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011 are only allowed to return to their houses temporarily.

On April 17, a 63-year-old man who temporarily returned to his house in the zone with his wife, wore protective gear to take photos of the cherry blossoms there.

Speaking on behalf of the dispersed Tomioka community, he said: "These cherry blossoms exist in all the people's memories. It is the best row of cherry blossom trees in Japan."

A look at Fukushima (NHK videos)

April 21, 2017

Reinvigorating Tohoku: A look at Fukushima Prefecture

<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/nhknewsline/34/alookatfukushimaprefecture/>

Iitate Junior High was a manufacturing factory that was turned into a makeshift school after the Fukushima nuclear disaster. Its students are evacuees from a village that became a no-entry zone. This week, NHK world has been providing in-depth coverage of Japan's Tohoku region. For the final day, NHK World's Minori Takao introduces Fukushima Prefecture.

The nuclear accident that followed the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, made the word "Fukushima" known around the world. This report explores people's stories to show the realities and the recovery of Fukushima.

Minori Takao spoke with Daniel Kahl, a TV personality who has deep ties to the Tohoku region. Watch the video for their discussion.

One school is located in Iitate village, which is about 40 kilometers north of the Daiichi nuclear plant. The village's roughly 6-thousand residents were ordered to evacuate.

A hallway in the school shows lots of messages of encouragement sent from around Japan and overseas. **The school principal, Ms. Setsuko Wada, spoke with Minori Takao and Daniel Kahl about it. Watch the video for their discussion.**

Chihiro Kan-no of NHK's Fukushima bureau reports on how events unfolded since the disaster.

On March 11th, 2011, a tsunami crippled the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

Hydrogen explosions destroyed buildings. 3 of the reactors went into meltdown and spewed radiation on the surrounding area.

The government ordered people to evacuate. More than 160,000 left their homes.

Because of the radiation, recovery work in much of the prefecture couldn't begin right away. Prosperous communities were left empty.

Those unable to return to their homes had to make decisions. Some moved into temporary housing, while others settled in new places.

Meanwhile, the world's most extensive nuclear cleanup began. Crews started removing radioactive soil and debris.

Bags with contaminated waste have been piling up everywhere. While there are plans for temporary storage facilities, there is no final disposal roadmap.

Gradually, evacuation orders have been lifted. Since 2011, the no-go zones have decreased considerably. The cities and villages that have been given the green light are facing many challenges.

In the city of Minamisoma, 18 percent of those who evacuated have returned. The majority are elderly.

Many young people are reluctant to return because of radiation fears and a lack of medical services.

So the challenge for communities is to help ease those concerns. They need to adapt and hopefully prosper under their new reality.

Watch the video for more of Takao's and Daniel's discussion of the situation facing residents affected by the disaster.

Evacuation orders have been lifted for many towns. But the order remains in place for a few areas. One of those is the town that hosts the Daiichi nuclear plant, Futaba. Ninety-six percent of it is still off limits for people to stay any longer than a few hours.

The so-called "no-entry zones" remain fenced off. At the screening gates, you're given disposable protection gear to wear over your clothes. Most places have been left untouched such as collapsed buildings and a clock that stopped at 2:46pm--the moment the big quake struck in 2011.

Along the farmland, flags are posted to show radiation levels: blue for low, red for very high. Takao placed a dosimeter near one of the red flags and got a reading of over 20 microsieverts per hour.

The Japanese government sets the yearly dosage at 1 millisievert, which translates into 0.23 microsieverts an hour. So that reading was about 100 times higher.

Decontamination work in Futaba is an ongoing process. And some municipalities at so-called "no-entry zones" basically block anyone under 15 years old, citing health concerns. NHK World's Minori Takao met a girl who waited patiently for her 15th birthday so she could visit her hometown.

Miu Sawagami is on her way to Futaba. Something she longed to do since the 2011 disaster--see the town with her own eyes.

Looking around, she asks, "Is that decontamination work? Debris?"

The area used to be lined with homes, but the tsunami wiped them out. Now there are only bags of contaminated soil.

"So this is what happens when no one's around," Miu says.

For Miu, it's a hometown, lost.

Her desire to visit Futaba grew from her experience at school. Miu's junior high has been holding classes in a city 40 kilometers away. There are now only 12 students.

The students have been too young to visit. So, the teachers give them updates about their town, like showing them photos they've taken in Futaba.

The photos follow the changes from the day of the disaster. One in particular grabbed Miu's attention. It shows an ostrich walking freely on one of the town's main roads.

"I found out what Futaba's like," Miu says. "The more I learn, the more I realize it's my hometown and I need to go back."

Miu lives with her grandparents and her mom in the same town her school evacuated to. She asked her mom to let her visit Futaba, as soon as she turned 15.

Her mother says, "I know it's not a very good environment to go to, but I want to respect my daughter's feelings."

The place Miu wanted to go to most was the house she grew up in.

Looking inside, Miu's mother says, "What a mess."

Miu says, "The wild animals came in."

They see where the family used to gather for meals.

Miu says, "I remember how we used to celebrate birthdays and Christmases here together."

Looking around, she recalls, "My cousins and I played on that swing!"

Miu was only 9 years old when she was forced out of her home. But her fondest memories are embedded there.

At the end of their visit, they went to where the disaster began.

Looking out, Miu says, "We can see it."

They are one kilometer away from the Daiichi nuclear power plant.

"I can't say I was never frustrated with what happened, but there's no point in feeling that way now.," Miu says. "It'll take a while before we can return, but I want to keep on visiting."

Watch the video for more of Takao's and Daniel's discussion about the town's road to recovery.

The students at the school here are around the same age as Miu. And like Miu, they've also lived away from their village for the past 6 years. The school's been working to help students maintain ties to their hometown.

The school has a special class called Furusato Gakushu or Hometown Studies. The first year they focus on experiencing the village's traditional performing arts.

They also study the challenges Iitate village faces, and have in-depth discussions about the reconstruction efforts. One student is Yuta Kumashiro.

Daniel: What did you learn from these projects?

Yuta: By learning our village's rice planting dance, I realized that our culture and arts have been cherished for many generations. It made me more determined to pass these traditions on to the next generation. We discussed how we could contribute to rebuilding Iitate. We gave presentations, and came to realize that we actually have an important role to play in the recovery of our village.

Watch the video for a rice-planting dance performance.

Another student is Ami Sato, a 3rd year student who's been studying English.

Daniel: Is there anything you want people outside of Japan to know about Iitate?

Ami: We want others to know how hard the people of Iitate have worked to keep the community together. I am proud of my village and don't want others to think of us as evacuees. I will continue to study different languages, so that I can talk about Iitate to people around the world.

Takao: The evacuation order for Iitate was lifted at the end of March. That means the junior high is getting ready to move back. Classes will start next April.

For 3rd year students like Ami and Yuta they will have graduated by then. But because of the programs here they will leave with a much closer connection to their hometown.

It's not just young people who have adapted to change in Fukushima. Industries have also had to overcome problems. Reporters from the NHK Fukushima bureau, Taku Hasegawa and Chihiro Kan-no, covered the story.

For the first in over 6 years, a fishing boat is welcomed into the port town of Namie.

On board, fisherman Ryohei Komatsu says, "I'm finally back."

Komatsu used to go out every day from here. He is finally allowed to fish from Namie again.

After the nuclear accident, most fishing off Fukushima's coast was restricted because of radiation. In the beginning only 3 kinds of fish were allowed to be caught and sold. This year, that number is about 100.

Officials there are screening fish. They say all the samples last year met the government's standard for the first time since the disaster. They say the fish is safe to eat.

Compared to before the disaster, last year's catches were 8 percent of what they used to be. But Komatsu believes things are on track for recovery. He says, "I want people to understand that fishery products from Fukushima are safe."

Komatsu says he will take things one step at a time.

There are also challenges on land. Farmers in the town of Naraha harvested rice last fall for the first time since the disaster.

Fukushima is one of the largest rice producing regions in the country, but it took a major hit in 2011.

When production slowly got going again in 2012, farmers screened every bag of rice for radiation. Over 40 million bags have been tested each year. If a bag fails the test, it isn't sold.

The safety precaution is seen as a must-do to ease concerns of consumers.

And when it comes to the region's sake brewers, spirits are high. Their bottles have won the most gold medals at Japan's national sake competition 4 years in a row.

Fukushima has about 6 dozen breweries up and running. They all worked together to rebound from the nuclear disaster.

Sake brewer Hiroyuki Matsuzaki says, "I want to strengthen techniques of the brewery. I can't do it without our teamwork. I want to make high quality sake and win another award."

Fukushima's top labels are even winning international acclaim, and have been served at global summits.

While producers in the Fukushima region say they've made great progress, they also say more work is needed to move past radiation concerns.

Another industry that's trying to recover is tourism. Most of the prefecture was not directly affected by the nuclear accident. Nonetheless it suffered a drop in the number of visitors. One famous tourist spot is Aizuwakamatsu. NHK World's Kanako Sachno reported on the situation there.

At Tsuruga-jo Castle, things are looking rather spring-like thanks to the cherry blossoms.

Originally built at the end of the 16th century, the castle was destroyed during a battle in the mid-19th century and rebuilt decades later.

There are 1,000 cherry trees around the compound.

NHK World was there since early in the morning and saw plenty of visitors coming to check things out, including tourists from overseas.

Kanako Sachno spoke with Zoe Vincent, whose job it is to promote Fukushima abroad. She's from England and is the 1st non-Japanese to be hired by Fukushima Prefecture Tourism Association.

Watch the video for their discussion of promoting Fukushima Prefecture.

Cherry blossoms are also blooming in another part of Fukushima.

For the first time since the disaster, people are back to cherish the view of the cherry blossom trees in Tomioka. The evacuation order was finally lifted for most of the town earlier this month.

It used to be popular with tourists so residents are hoping visitors will return.

Fukushima has its children back...

April 23, 2017

Six Years Later, Fukushima Has Its Children Back

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/SDI201704234155.html>

By MOTOKO RICH/ © 2017 The New York Times

NARAHARA, Japan--The children returned to Naraha this spring.

For more than four years, residents were barred from this hamlet in Fukushima after an earthquake and tsunami caused a meltdown at a nuclear power plant north of town. When the government lifted the evacuation order in 2015, those who returned were mostly the elderly, who figured coming home was worth the residual radiation risk.

But this month, six years after the disaster, 105 students turned up at Naraha Elementary and Junior High School for the beginning of the Japanese school year.

Every morning, cafeteria workers measure the radiation in fresh ingredients used in lunches. In some grades, as few as six students take their lessons in classrooms built to accommodate as many as 30. There are not enough junior high students to field a baseball team on the new field next to the school.

Yet the return of the schoolchildren, the youngest of whom were born the year of the disaster, has been a powerful sign of renewal in this town, which is in the original 12-mile exclusion zone around the Fukushima plant.

Reopening the school “is very, very meaningful,” said Sachiko Araki, the principal of the junior high school. “A town without a school is not really a town.”

The new, \$18 million two-story building has shiny blond wood floors, spacious classrooms, two science labs, a library filled with new books and a large basketball gymnasium. A balcony at the back of the building overlooks the sea.

Many emotions fueled the decisions of the families who returned to Naraha. It was always a small town, with just over 8,000 people before the disaster. So far, only 1 in 5 former residents has come home.

A bank, post office and medical clinic are now open, but a supermarket is still being built. Because neighborhoods have stood empty for so long, wild boars sometimes roam the streets.

With thousands of bags of contaminated soil piled high in fields around town and radiation meters posted in parking lots, the memory of the nuclear disaster is never distant.

At the Naraha school, which was being constructed when the disaster hit, workers destroyed a foundation that had just been laid and started over, removing mounds of dirt in an effort to decontaminate the site.

Today, radiation is regularly monitored on the school grounds as well as along routes to the building. The central government, based on recommendations from the International Commission on Radiological Protection, set a maximum exposure of 0.23 microsieverts an hour, a level at which there is no concrete scientific evidence of increased cancer risk. (Microsieverts measure the health effects of low levels of radiation.)

Still, some teachers say they are extra careful. Aya Kitahara, a fifth-grade teacher, said she and her colleagues had decided it was not safe to allow children to collect acorns or pine cones in the neighborhood for art projects, for fear that they would pick up small doses of radiation.

Nearby, a nursery school and day care center was built mostly with money from the nuclear plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co., in 2007 and reopened this month. Keiko Hayakawa, the principal, said she was surprised that the city had pushed to bring back children before all bags of contaminated soil had been cleared from town.

“We had to start and keep moving to open this facility as soon as possible,” Hayakawa said on a morning when 3- and 4-year-olds romped in a large playground, climbing a jungle gym, riding scooters and digging in a sandbox. “Otherwise, there was a fear that people might never come back.”

Calculations of radiation exposure are imprecise at best. They may not detect contaminated soil from rain runoff that can collect in gutters or other low-lying crevices. Risk of illness depends on many variables, including age, activities and underlying health conditions.

“I don’t want to accuse anyone of being consciously disingenuous,” said Kyle Cleveland, associate professor of sociology at Temple University in Tokyo, who has written about the psychological effects of the Fukushima disaster. But government officials “have every incentive to downplay the level of risk and to put a positive spin on it.”

Reviving the towns of Fukushima is also a priority for the central government. With the 2020 Olympics to be held in Tokyo, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe wants to deliver on his promise that the Fukushima cleanup effort is “under control.”

“It is really up to the individuals whether they would accept the current environment or not,” said Kentaro Yanai, the superintendent of the Naraha school district. “But for us, we did the best that we could have done so far in order to reduce radiation levels.”

For young families, factors other than radiation risks weighed on the calculus of whether to return. Some longed to go back to the town that had been their home for generations, while others assumed they could afford more space in Naraha.

And as national compensation payments for evacuees are set to expire next year, some residents secured jobs working for the town government or for contractors involved in the reconstruction work. Still others are employed by Tokyo Electric, which is coordinating the huge cleanup at the Fukushima Daiichi plant. Ayuka Ohwada, 29, had originally thought she and her family would stay in Iwaki, a city of about 340,000 more than 20 miles south, where many Naraha residents lived during the evacuation. But once her parents moved back to their old home, Ohwada and her children, now 8 and 6, began visiting on weekends.

“I started thinking that maybe the countryside is a much better environment for my children,” said Ohwada, whose parents offered her a piece of land to build a new house. Ohwada, who was employed as a convenience store clerk before landing a job at town hall, said she and her husband, who works in a nearby town at a company involved in decontamination, could never afford a stand-alone house in Iwaki. In Naraha, the school is doing as much as it can to cushion the return for young families.

The building, which was originally designed for the junior high school, now houses two elementary schools as well. Extra counselors talk students through lingering anxieties, and the fifth- and sixth-grade classes have two teachers each. All students will receive tablet computers, and lunch and school uniforms are provided free.

Yuka Kusano, 37, said her children had grown accustomed to large classes while they were evacuated in Iwaki. But after enrolling in the Naraha school this month, she said, they benefit from individualized attention rare in Japanese schools.

Her 12-year-old daughter, Miyu, is in seventh grade with just five other classmates, and her son, Ryuya, 9, is in a fourth-grade class of 13 students.

“It is really luxurious,” Kusano said. Still, with so few children in Naraha, she drives Ryuya to Iwaki on weekends so he can play on a softball team.

Hints emerge of the turmoil the students have endured in the six years since the disaster. During a recent presentation for parents, one girl with thick bangs and large black glasses said she had struggled with frequent moves.

“I am doing OK,” she said. “I just want to keep stability in my life.”

Such stability is one reason many families with young children have chosen not to return.

Tsutomu Sato, a nursing home manager with three daughters, 9, 5 and 2, said the family had moved seven or eight times after being evacuated from Naraha.

“I just want to build a base for my family as soon as possible,” said Sato, who bought a house in the Yumoto neighborhood of Iwaki. He said his oldest daughter cried whenever he raised the possibility of moving back to Naraha, where his parents and grandmother were restoring their house and planned to move back next year.

In exile, he maintains a fierce attachment to his hometown and has formed a volunteer group, Naranoha, to stage cultural events to bring together the diaspora of former residents around the region. He said that if his parents grew too frail to take care of themselves, he would consider moving back.

“With or without the disaster, we have to make life decisions based on our circumstances,” he said.

In Naraha, the mayor, Yukiei Matsumoto, said surveys showed that just under three-quarters of former residents wanted to return eventually.

“In order to clear the stigma that people have,” he said, “we are back now to show the rest of the country and the rest of the world that we are doing well.” But he acknowledged that if more young people did not return, the town had a dim future.

Kazushige Watanabe, 73, said he had come back even though the tsunami had destroyed his home and his sons lived outside Fukushima prefecture.

He has moved into a compact bungalow built by the city in a new subdivision in the center of the town, where he has lived alone since his wife’s death in January.

He pointed out a house around the corner where a family with three children had moved in recently. “I can hear the children’s voices,” he said. “That is very nice.”

Hisako Ueno contributed reporting.

(April 21, 2017)

Iitate has a restaurant...

April 24, 2017

Udon restaurant reopens in Fukushima village

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20170424_11/

An udon noodle restaurant has reopened in a village near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant about a month after Japan's government lifted the area's evacuation order.

Yoshiharu Takahashi inherited the 60-year-old restaurant in Iitate from his father. But the 2011 nuclear accident forced him to evacuate to Fukushima City, where he set up his business again. Now, he's back on home turf.

On Sunday, Takahashi skillfully prepared dough for noodles and then hung up his open-for-business sign.

A steady stream of customers, including evacuees visiting the area to prepare for their move back, came to taste the locally made udon.

Local officials say it's the 1st eating establishment to be reopened in the village since the evacuation order was lifted.

A woman in her 60s says Takahashi's noodles taste as delicious as they used to. She says she feels grateful Iitate now has a restaurant and that she'll visit Takahashi's often after she returns to the village.

Takahashi says he's very happy many people came to eat his udon and that he hopes his restaurant will give the village a boost.

Voluntary evacuees

April 25, 2017

80% of voluntary Fukushima disaster evacuees outside pref. won't move back: survey

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170425/p2a/00m/0na/003000c>

FUKUSHIMA -- Some 80 percent of voluntary Fukushima nuclear disaster evacuees now living in other areas of Japan have no intention of returning, results of a Fukushima Prefectural Government survey released on April 24 show.

- **【Related】** As I See It: Support for 'voluntary evacuees' insufficient but not too late to start
- **【Related】** Survey on Fukushima-linked bullying reveals hundreds more cases
- **【Related】** Photo Journal: In flower again

The prefecture ended a housing subsidy for voluntary evacuees at the end of March this year, stating that the "living environment (in Fukushima Prefecture) is in good order" due to ongoing decontamination work and other factors.

Voluntary evacuees "still worry about radiation, and many of them have shifted the foundations of their lives to the places they've evacuated to," the prefectural official in charge of the survey said.

The survey covered 12,239 voluntary evacuee households that had been receiving the prefectural housing subsidy, of which 5,718 households had left Fukushima Prefecture. A total of 4,781 supplied answers to the prefecture regarding where they intended to live in the future, 78.2 percent of which stated that they would "continue living" in the area they had evacuated to. Another 3.5 percent stated that they would move, but not back to Fukushima Prefecture. Only 18.3 percent of respondent households said they intended to move back to the prefecture.

However, only 23.6 percent of voluntary evacuees living in Fukushima Prefecture said they would stay in their current locations, while 66.6 percent said they hope to return to their pre-disaster homes.

Fukushima Gov. Masao Uchibori told reporters at an April 24 news conference, "It's essential to respect the evacuees intentions" about returning home. "However, we will work to create an environment where people can live with peace of mind, so evacuees can return home in the future."

'Voluntary' evacuees torn by decision to flee from Fukushima

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201704250040.html>

By KENJI IZAWA/ Staff Writer

FUKUSHIMA--Facing diminishing public support and increased scorn from their hometown communities, residents who fled Fukushima Prefecture after the nuclear disaster are now struggling with self-doubts about their decision to leave.

They are called “voluntary” evacuees because they left areas that were not subject to the central government’s evacuations orders after the tsunami slammed into the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011.

Since then, they have faced hardships in starting new lives and finding new homes. And persistent fears over radiation continue to prevent many from returning to their hometowns in the prefecture.

When the nuclear crisis was unfolding, Nahoko Hikichi, 44, took her infant and 4-year-old child to Asahikawa, Hokkaido, leaving behind her husband in an area of Koriyama, which was not ordered to evacuate.

Hikichi pored over library books to learn more about the situation in Fukushima, but some of the books dismissed safety concerns about radiation while others warned about health hazards.

“I only became more confused and worried after reading,” she said.

Hikichi said she is torn over whether she made the right choice to leave, but she added she will take no solace if her decision proves correct.

“I chose to flee because I did not want any future regrets over not evacuating,” she said. “If I become convinced that my decision was sound, it would come at a time when the impact of radiation has manifested among children who stayed in the prefecture.

“I am hoping for nothing like that to ever happen.”

Her husband later quit his job to join the family in Asahikawa, but his parents remain in Fukushima Prefecture.

The past month has been particularly tough on those who evacuated voluntarily since the prefectural government ended their free housing program.

At the end of March, 119 of about 12,000 households that evacuated voluntarily within or outside Fukushima Prefecture had not decided where to live, the prefectural government said on April 24.

Although prefectural officials would not disclose further details about their situation, some of the households reportedly cited financial difficulties as a reason for being unable to find new homes.

Fukushima Governor Masao Uchibori pledged to work closely with local governments where the evacuees’ old and new homes are located to help them.

People forced to flee under the evacuation orders are eligible to receive at least 8.5 million yen (\$77,300) in compensation.

But those who evacuated voluntarily have received a fraction of that figure, and their free housing program has ended.

In terms of rebuilding from the nuclear disaster, Tokyo is now emphasizing self-reliance among evacuees without public support or compensation.

Voluntary evacuees and their supporters have criticized this policy, but the prefectural government shares the central government’s direction.

Tokyo’s evacuation orders forced around 81,000 people to leave their homes around the nuclear plant. Since then, the central government has been lifting the evacuation orders in an effort to have people return to their homes.

In fact, the orders had been lifted for all areas by spring this year with the exception of “difficult-to-return zones,” where radiation levels remain high.

That means more than 50,000 evacuees can return to their homes.

As of last autumn, voluntary evacuees who have not returned to their original homes totaled 26,000, or 30 percent of the overall evacuee population.

Some residents who remained in the prefecture after the nuclear accident are upset by evacuees who say that Fukushima is still too dangerous to live in.

“We reside in Fukushima Prefecture, and I would like them not to speak ill of the prefecture,” said a woman in her 40s who lives in the prefectural capital of Fukushima.

Efforts are under way to bridge the divide among those who remain volunteer evacuees, those who have returned to the prefecture, and residents who stayed in their communities.

A nonprofit organization opened a community center in a two-story house in Fukushima city in March 2015 to allow mothers with young children to share their daily concerns.

Some mothers wanted to know where to buy food ingredients. Others wondered if they have been overreacting to the radiation.

“Many mothers who have returned to the prefecture after fleeing outside are worried about whether they will be able to restore ties with their peers who did not evacuate,” said Megumi Tomita, 47, who heads the project.

Although the NPO does not offer specific problem-solving proposals, Tomita said it is important for anxious mothers to have a venue where they can pour out their feelings.

After the community center opened, the mothers, accompanied by experts, took part in a workshop to measure radioactivity levels of foodstuffs.

They also grow vegetables in nearby fields.

The NPO compiled a booklet in spring featuring messages from 31 mothers who have returned to the prefecture after deciding to flee. Their words are directed at those who remain in evacuation.

“I don’t think your choice is wrong,” said one mother.

“I will give you my moral support,” another message said.

Tomita said their messages summarize a shared feeling: “Those who have evacuated voluntarily have had to make countless decisions over the past six years. The mothers who have had such experiences feel that whatever the decisions the other mothers made, they are not wrong.”

New reconstruction minister Yoshino

April 27, 2017

New reconstruction minister visits tsunami-hit areas in bid to mend ties

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/04/27/national/new-reconstruction-minister-visits-tsunami-hit-areas-bid-mend-ties/#.WQHFEdykKos>

Kyodo

FUKUSHIMA – The new disaster reconstruction minister on Thursday visited areas damaged by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, vowing to restore confidence in the government among those dismayed by his predecessor’s gaffes.

“I came here today in the hope of regaining trust,” Masayoshi Yoshino, who replaced Masahiro Imamura on Wednesday, told Fukushima Gov. Masao Uchibori. The prefecture is struggling to rebuild not only from the quake and tsunami but also from the nuclear disaster they triggered.

In remarks made the same morning to the 2011 disaster reconstruction committees of both houses of the Diet, Yoshino vowed to “put myself alongside those affected by the disasters, perform my functions (as minister) and further accelerate recovery.”

Yoshino, a six-term Liberal Democratic Party lawmaker in the House of Representatives, hails from Iwaki, which is part of his constituency on the Fukushima coast.

“Since immediately after the disaster, I have sincerely listened to the voices of those affected and shared their pain and suffering, as someone who was also affected,” Yoshino said.

“I will work not just to bring (the areas) back to the state they were in before, but to create a new northeast,” he said, noting that many people in the recovering areas still face difficult living conditions, although the number of displaced people has fallen to nearly a quarter of the 470,000 peak.

Yoshino’s predecessor said at a party Tuesday evening that it was “a good thing” the 2011 disaster struck northeastern Japan rather than the Tokyo area, due to the greater costs that would have been involved. Imamura, a native of Saga Prefecture, took back the remark and apologized but ended up resigning the following morning. The seven-term LDP Lower House lawmaker had assumed his first Cabinet post in August last year.

Before being appointed minister on Wednesday, Yoshino was chairman of the Lower House special committee on disaster reconstruction.

Taking his place as chairman is fellow LDP lawmaker Shunichi Suzuki, elected from a constituency in Iwate.

New reconstruction minister blasts predecessor over 'intolerable' gaffe

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170427/p2a/00m/0na/002000c>

Newly appointed Reconstruction Minister Masayoshi Yoshino answers a question from a reporter at a news conference in Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo, on April 26, 2017. (Mainichi)

Newly appointed Reconstruction Minister Masayoshi Yoshino criticized his predecessor Masahiro Imamura, who resigned on April 26 to take responsibility for his gaffe over the Great East Japan Earthquake, saying Imamura's remark was "intolerable."

- **【Related】** Reconstruction minister's resignation reveals gov't's sloppiness under Abe's dominance
- **【Related】** Disaster minister Imamura resigns after quake gaffe
- **【Related】** Opposition parties question PM's responsibility as Cabinet minister gaffes pile up

"I'm a disaster victim. I understand victims' feelings more than anyone else," Yoshino said at the outset of about a 20-minute news conference on April 26 shortly after his appointment. He added that his home and office in Fukushima Prefecture were hit by tsunami triggered by the March 2011 earthquake.

"I can truly stand by disaster victims," Yoshino said passionately.

Imamura stated on April 25 it was "a good thing" that the disaster hit the Tohoku region instead of the densely populated Tokyo metropolitan area, forcing him to decide later in the day to step down. Imamura was officially replaced by Yoshino on April 26.

When asked to comment on insensitive words and deeds by Cabinet members and other officials involved in disaster recovery, Yoshino said, "I think successive (reconstruction) ministers have empathized with people in disaster-hit areas in responding to recovery from the disaster."

In reply to a question about government responses to those who have voluntarily evacuated areas hit by the Fukushima nuclear disaster out of concerns about radiation, the new reconstruction minister said, "We'd like to extend further assistance if aid provided so far is insufficient."

Imamura had also come under fire over an earlier gaffe, in which he said such voluntary evacuees were "self-accountable."

See also : <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2017/04/27/editorials/reconstruction-minister-axed/>

Fukushima food "no immediate problem", says FAO

May 8, 2017

U.N. food agency 'convinced' that Fukushima food is safe to eat

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201705080043.html>

By YUKIE YAMAOKA/ Correspondent

ROME--Food produced in Fukushima Prefecture is safe, but continued monitoring will be needed to ensure that remains the case, according to the U.N. Food and Agricultural Organization's top official.

"We've been following this issue very closely," said FAO Director-General Jose Graziano da Silva in a recent interview with The Asahi Shimbun, referring to the safety of agricultural products and other food items grown and manufactured in the prefecture.

"We are also periodically testing samples to certify that the food presents no danger to human beings. For the moment we are convinced that there is no immediate problem with the food coming from that area." He added that maintaining control over the situation is crucial.

The Rome-based FAO began conducting checks on food products from Fukushima **in collaboration with the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna** after the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011.

Da Silva said he is happy with measures that the Japanese government has implemented as precautions for consumers and assistance to local farmers as they comply with international regulations.

His comments came ahead of his first visit to Japan in four years, scheduled from May 9.

In addition to meetings with Japanese government officials, Da Silva is expected to participate in an event organized by the Japanese Foreign Ministry in which attendees will sample desserts made with fruits grown in the prefecture.

Da Silva also said he expects to learn more about the Japanese diet to address the global issue of obesity, which he described as the "most important problem" in advanced countries.

"Japan is our best example," he said of the nation's lowest obesity rate among the developed world. "We want to learn more about what the Japanese do to avoid obesity. This is part of the culture; your traditional diet is even recognized by UNESCO as a healthy diet."

Japan's contribution to the FAO is the second largest after the United States, and its funds have been used to install an irrigation system in Afghanistan.

The FAO, working with Tokyo, is set to increase its number of Japanese staff over a five-year program as the country is under-represented at the organization.

Dancing in Fukushima

May 8, 2017

Training for new 'Hula Girls' begins in Fukushima

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20170508_29/

A group of young women have started training to become hula dancers at a hot spring resort in Fukushima Prefecture, northeastern Japan.

The dancers are called the Hula Girls, and have been the resort's special attraction in Iwaki City.

Dance training for the 12 new recruits began on Monday after one month in the employee training program. They will make their debut in August.

During the practice, they did relatively well as many of them have some dance experience.

Manami Abe from Akita Prefecture said she enjoyed the practice because she had not danced in a long time.

Anna Shimoda from Iwaki City said she has wanted to be one of the resort's Hula Girls since she was a child, adding that she will work hard to learn the dance techniques.

Safety of Fukushima food "assured", says FAO Chief (2)

May 10, 2017

FAO chief pitches safety of Fukushima foods in tasting event

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/05/10/national/fao-chief-pitches-safety-fukushima-foods-tasting-event/>

Kyodo

The head of the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization said Wednesday the safety of food produced in Fukushima is “assured,” despite the import bans still imposed by some countries in the wake of the 2011 nuclear disaster.

“At the moment, we don’t see any reason to raise concern about the safety of food,” FAO Director General Jose Graziano da Silva told a tasting event in Tokyo where he ate sweets made from pears and apples grown in the northeastern prefecture.

“Six years after the accident, we continue to monitor all the foods from the area affected. ... We have to say that the Japanese government has been supportive and very transparent despite the difficult situation,” said the director general, who is in Japan from Tuesday to Friday.

Following the nuclear accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant on March 11, 2011, which led to environmental contamination, many countries introduced import restrictions on Japanese foods.

According to the Foreign Ministry, more than 30 countries and regions, including China, South Korea and Taiwan, still impose such restrictions, while some 20 countries have eased or lifted the measures.

At the event, Kentaro Sonoura, a senior vice foreign minister, also noted that “while reconstruction and recovery work is steadily making progress, the reputation damage from the nuclear accident still remains even after six years.”

He stressed that the Japanese ministries, including foreign and agriculture, as well as its embassies and consulates overseas are working as one to pitch the safety of Japan-made products while urging other governments to remove their import bans.

Fukushima Mayor Kaoru Kobayashi also hoped that the negative reputation would become a thing of the past. He said that **the products made in the prefecture are safe due to the advanced technology used in decontamination measures and to the monitoring and inspection system, which he said is the “best in the world.”**

Rice planting for commercial sales starts again in Fukushima

May 10, 2017

Fukushima village begins sowing rice for first time since nuclear crisis

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/05/10/national/fukushima-village-begins-sowing-rice-first-time-since-nuclear-crisis/#.WRNo69ykKic>

Kyodo

FUKUSHIMA – Rice planting for commercial sales began on Wednesday in a village in Fukushima Prefecture for the first time since the 2011 disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

A total of eight farms in Iitate plan to resume growing rice this year in a combined area of about 7 hectares after evacuation orders were lifted at the end of March for large parts of the village.

With much of the area contaminated by radiation following the nuclear crisis, the total arable area has shrunk from around 690 hectares before the disaster, according to the village.

The farmers will conduct radiation tests before shipping their rice. No rice grown in the village has shown levels of radioactivity exceeding the safety standard since experimental rice planting began in 2012.

“(I feel) comfortable. We want to get back even a step closer to the village of six years ago,” said Shoichi Takahashi, 64, while working a rice planting machine.

The municipality has supported farming efforts, including installing electric fences around the area to protect the rice fields from wild boar and working the soil after decontamination.

Measures to encourage evacuees to return to Fukushima are also slowly underway.

On Wednesday, an Upper House committee passed a bill aimed at boosting government support so evacuees can return to their homes earlier in areas which are off-limits in principle in the wake of the March 2011 nuclear meltdowns.

The Upper House plenary session is expected to clear the bill soon, allowing the government to fund more infrastructure rebuilding such as roads and get rid of radioactive substances in the area.

The bill already cleared the House of Representatives on April 14 but deliberations in the upper chamber stalled after Masahiro Imamura, who served as reconstruction minister, sparked outrage following a series of gaffes and ultimately resigned on April 26.

Minamisoma Mayor Katsunobu Sakurai called on Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Wednesday to help introduce an advanced medical care system in the city north of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Sakurai made the plea during his meeting with Abe at the Prime Minister’s Office.

The evacuation order was lifted last July in one part of the city but medical institutions and clinics had been on the decline even before the natural disasters and nuclear crisis.

In a bid to ease residents’ health concerns, the city office is developing a system where residents have access to doctors online.

Goichiro Toyoda, head of Medley Inc., which provides the remote medical care system, asked the government to revise regulations to allow a broader reach for the program.

Abe said he will do his best.

Fukushima: Where are the people?



May 13, 2017

In Fukushima, a land where few return

The evacuation orders for most of the village of Iitate have been lifted. But where are the people?

<http://www.fukushima-is-still-news.com/2017/05/fukushima-where-are-the-people.html>

by David McNeill and Chie Matsumoto

Special To The Japan Times

IITATE, FUKUSHIMA PREF. – **Some day when I have done what I set out to do, I'll return home one of these days, where the mountains are green, my old country home, where the waters are clear, my old country home.**

— *"Furusato," Tatsuyuki Takano*

A cherry tree is blooming in the spring sunshine outside the home of Masaaki Sakai but there is nobody to see it. The house is empty and boarded up. Weeds poke through the ground. All around are telltale signs of wild boar, which descend from the mountains to root and forage in the fields. Soon, the 60-year-old farmhouse Sakai shared with his mother and grandmother will be demolished.

"I don't feel especially sad," Sakai says. "We have rebuilt our lives elsewhere. I can come back and look around — just not live here."

A few hundred meters away the road is blocked and a beeping dosimeter begins nagging at the bucolic peace. The reading here is a shade over 1 microsievert per hour — a fraction of what it was when Sakai's family fled in 2011.



A radiation monitoring post is installed in the village of Iitate on March 27, ahead of the lifting of an evacuation order for most areas of the village. The post bears the message 'Welcome home.' | KYODO

The radiation goes up and down, depending on the weather, Sakai says. In gullies and cracks in the road, and up in the trees, it soars. With almost everyone gone, the monkeys who live in the forests have grown bolder, stopping to stare at the odd car that appears instead of fleeing, as they used to.

A cluster of 20 small hamlets spread over 230 square kilometers, Iitate was undone by a quirk of the weather in the days that followed the nuclear accident in March 2011. Wind carried radioactive particles from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, which is located about 45 kilometers away, that fell in rain and snow on the night of March 15, 2011. After more than a month of indecision, during which the villagers lived with some of the highest radiation recorded in the disaster (the reading outside the village office on the evening of March 15 was a startling 44.7 microsieverts per hour), the government ordered them to leave.

Now, the government says it is safe to go back. With great fanfare, all but the still heavily contaminated south of Iitate, Nagadoro, was reopened on March 31.

The reopening fulfills a pledge made by Mayor Norio Kanno: Iitate was the first local authority in Fukushima Prefecture to set a date for ending evacuation in 2012, when the mayor promised to reboot the village in five years. The village has a new sports ground, convenience store and udon restaurant. A clinic sees patients twice a week. All that's missing is people.

Waiting to meet Kanno in the government offices of Iitate, the eye falls on a book displayed in the reception: “The Most Beautiful Villages in Japan.” Listed at No. 12 is the beloved rolling patchwork of forests, hills and fields the mayor has governed for more than two decades — population 6,300, famous for its neat terraces of rice and vegetables, its industrious organic farmers, its wild mushrooms and the black *wagyu* cow that has taken the name of the area.

The description in the book is mocked by reality outside. The fields are mostly bald, shorn of vegetation in a Promethean attempt to decontaminate it of the radiation that fell six years ago. There is not a cow or a farmer in sight. Tractors sit idle in the fields. The local schools are empty. As for the population, the only part of the village that looks busy is the home for the elderly across the road from Kanno’s office.



A school sits deserted in Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture, in April. | DAVID MCNEILL

“The village will never return to how it used to be before the disaster,” Kanno says, “but it may develop in a different way.”

Recovery has started, Kanno says, wondering whether returnees will be able to start building a village they like.

“Who knows? Maybe one day that may help bring back evacuees or newcomers,” Kanno says. “Life doesn’t improve if you remain pessimistic.”

Even for those who have permanently left, he adds, “it doesn’t mean that their *furusato* can just disappear.”

The pull of the *furusato* (hometown) is exceptionally strong in Japan, says Tom Gill, a British anthropologist who has written extensively about Iitate.

Yearning for it “is expressed in countless sentimental ballads,” Gill says. “One particular song, simply titled ‘Furusato,’ has been sung by children attending state schools in Japan since 1914.”

The appeal has persisted despite — or perhaps because of — the fact that the rural/urban imbalance in Japan is more skewed than in any other developed nation, Gill says; just 10 percent of the nation’s population live in the country.

This may partly explain the extraordinary efforts to bring east Fukushima back to life. By one study, more than ¥2.34 trillion has been spent decontaminating an area roughly half the size of Rhode Island.

There has been no official talk of abandoning it. Indeed, any suggestion otherwise could be controversial: When industry minister Yoshio Hachiro called the abandoned communities “towns of death” in September 2011, the subsequent outrage forced him to quit a week later.

Instead, the area was divided into three zones with awkward euphemisms to suggest just the opposite: Communities with annual radiation measuring 20 millisieverts or less (the typical worldwide limit for workers in nuclear plants) are “being prepared for lifting of evacuation order,” districts of 20-50 millisieverts per year are “no-residence zones” and the most heavily contaminated areas of 50 millisieverts or more per year, such as Nagadoro, are “difficult-to-return.”

In September 2015, Naraha, which is located 15 kilometers south of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, became the first town in the prefecture to completely lift the evacuation order imposed after the triple meltdown. Naraha has a publicly built shopping street, a new factory making lithium batteries, a kindergarten and a secondary school.

A team of decontamination workers has been sent to every house — in some cases several times. Of the pre-disaster 7,400 residents, about 1,500 mainly elderly people have returned, the local government says, although that figure is likely inflated.

In Iitate, the cost of decontamination works out at about ¥200 million per household. That, and the passage of time, has dramatically reduced radiation in many areas to below 20 millisieverts a year. However, Kanno says, the cleanup extends to only 20 meters around each house, and three-quarters of the village is forested mountains. In windy weather, radioactive elements are blown back onto the fields and homes.

“All that money, and for what?” asks Nobuyoshi Itoh, a farmer and critic of the mayor. “Would you bring children here and let them roam in the fields and forests?”

Itoh opted to stay in one of the more heavily toxic parts of the village after everyone fled, with little apparent ill effect, although he says his immune system has weakened.

One of the reasons why Iitate was such a pleasant place to live before the nuclear crisis, he recalls, was its unofficial barter system. “Most people here never bought vegetables; they grew them,” he says. “I would bring someone potatoes and they would give me eggs. That’s gone now.”

At most, he says, a few hundred people are back — but they’re invariably older or retired.

“They alone will not sustain the village,” Itoh says. “Who will drive them around or look after them when they are sick?”

As the depth of the disaster facing Iitate became clear, local people began to squabble among themselves. Some were barely scraping a living and wanted to leave, although saying so out loud — abandoning the *furusato* — was often difficult. Many joined lawsuits against the government.

Even before disaster struck, the village had lost a third of its population since 1970 as its young folk relocated to the cities, mirroring the hollowing-out of rural areas across the country. Some wanted to shift the entire village elsewhere, but Kanno wouldn’t hear of it.

Compensation could be a considerable incentive. In addition to ¥100,000 a month to cover the “mental anguish” of being torn from their old lives, there was extra money for people with houses or farms. A five-year lump sum was worth ¥6 million per person — twice that for Nagadoro. One researcher estimates a rough figure of ¥50 million for the average household, sufficient to leave behind the uncertainties and worries of Iitate and buy a house a few dozen miles away, close enough to return for work or to the village’s cool, tranquil summers.

Many have already done so. Though nobody knows the true figure, the local talk is that perhaps half of the villagers have permanently left. Surveys suggest fewer than 30 percent want to return, and even less in the case of Nagadoro.

Yoshitomo Shigihara, head of the Nagadoro hamlet, says many families made their decision some time ago. His grandchildren, he says, should not have to live in such a place.

“It’s our job to protect them,” Shigihara says. He lives in the city of Fukushima but returns roughly every 10 days to inspect his house and weed the land.

Even with so much money spent, Shigihara doubts whether it will bring many of his friends or relatives back. At 70 years of age, he is not sure that he even wants to return, he says.

“I sometimes get upset thinking about it, but I can’t talk with anyone in Fukushima, even my family, because we often end up quarreling,” he says. “People try to feel out whether the others are receiving benefits, what they are getting or how much they received in compensation. It’s very stressful to talk to anyone in Iitate. I’m starting to hate myself because I end up treating others badly out of frustration.”

Kanno has won six elections since 1996 and has overseen every step of Iitate’s painful rehabilitation, navigating between the anger and despair of his constituents and the official response to the disaster from the government and Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings (Tepco), operator of the crippled nuclear plant.



Ground Self-Defense Force members decontaminate areas tainted with radioactive substances in Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture, in December 2011. | KYODO

He wants more money to complete decontamination work (the government claims it is finished), repair roads and infrastructure. Returnees need financial support, he says. However, it is time, he believes, to end the monthly compensation, which, in his view, induces dependency.

“If people keep saying that life is hard, they will not be able to recover,” he says. “What we need is support for livelihoods.”

A new system gives seed money to people who voluntarily come back to start businesses or farms.

“We don’t want to give the impression that we are influencing people’s decisions or forcing them to return,” the mayor says, using the phrase “*kokoro ni fumikomu*,” which literally means “to step into hearts.”

Yet, next year, thousands of Iitate evacuees will face a choice: Go back or lose the money that has helped sustain them elsewhere for six years. Evacuation from areas exposed to less than 20 millisieverts per year will be regarded as “voluntary” under the official compensation scheme.

This dilemma was expressed with unusual starkness last month by Masahiro Imamura, the now sacked minister in charge of reconstructing Tohoku. Pressed by a freelance reporter, Imamura tetchily said it was up to the evacuees themselves — their “own responsibility, their own choice” — whether or not to return. The comment touched a nerve. The government is forcing people to go back, some argued, employing a form of economic blackmail, or worse, *kimin seisaku* — abandoning them to their fate.

Itoh is angry at the resettlement. For him, politics drives the haste to put the disaster behind.

“It’s inhuman to make people go back to this,” he says. Like the physical damage of radiation, he says, the psychological damage is also invisible: “A lot of people are suffering in silence.”

Itoh believes the government wants to show that the problems of nuclear power can be overcome so it can switch the nation’s idling nuclear reactors back on. Just four are in operation while the fate of 42 others remains in political and legal limbo. Public opinion remains opposed to their restart.

Many people began with high hopes in Iitate but have gradually grown distrustful of the village government, says Kenichi Hasegawa, a farmer who wrote a book titled “*Genpatsu ni Furusato o Ubawarete*” (“Fukushima’s Stolen Lives”) in 2012. Right from the start, he says, the mayor desperately tried to hide the shocking radiation outside his office.

“Villagers have started losing interest,” Hasegawa says.

Meetings called by the mayor are poorly attended.

“But they hold meetings anyway,” Hasegawa says, “just to say they did.”

Kanno rejects talk of defeatism. A tourist shop is expected to open in August that will attract people to the area, he says. Some villagers are paving entrances to their houses, using money from the reconstruction budget. As for radiation, everyone “has their own idea” about its effects. The lifting of the evacuation is only the start.

Itoh says he once trusted public officials but those days are long gone. By trying to save the village, he says, the mayor may in fact be killing it.



Bags filled with contaminated waste sit in a field in the village of Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture, in March 2016. | KYODO

TEPCO: No time for personnel feuds

May 12, 2017

As I See It: Six years later, no time for TEPCO personnel squabbles

https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170512/p2a/00m/0na/014000c#cxrecs_s*

Six years since the outbreak of the nuclear disaster at Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) Holdings Inc.'s Fukushima nuclear plant, the utility still faces massive challenges. And yet, what I've come to see through my reporting is that efforts meant to help revitalize the company's finances in order to secure the funds needed to bring the nuclear crisis under control and compensate victims, have been overshadowed by petty feuds over personnel appointments between executives dispatched by the central government -- which effectively owns the company -- and dyed-in-the-wool TEPCO employees. Rebuilding TEPCO will be impossible if such squabbles are not put to rest.

- **【Related】** TEPCO to reshuffle top management, promote Kobayakawa to president
- **【Related】** TEPCO aims for nuclear power business realignment in 2020s

In March of this year, TEPCO announced an outline of its revitalization plans, with a restructuring of its nuclear power business as a central pillar, as well as a reshuffling of executive personnel. According to the announcement, chairman Fumio Sudo, 76, will be replaced by Takashi Kawamura, 77, the previous chairman at Hitachi Ltd., and president Naomi Hirose, 64, will be replaced by 53-year-old board director Tomoaki Kobayakawa.

After the nuclear crisis began in March 2011, TEPCO was effectively nationalized. The plan has been for TEPCO to increase its earning power by rebuilding its finances under the central government's management, so that it could secure the funds necessary to decommission the reactors at Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant and compensate victims of the disaster.

With the nationalization of TEPCO, the government swept the utility clean of all its old executives and in addition to placing bureaucrats from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) on the company's board, in 2014 it put Sudo, formerly of major steel corporation JFE Holdings, in the position of TEPCO chairman. However, when Sudo, with the backing of the government, implemented cost-cutting measures, grumblings were heard within the company that Sudo was seeking too many results too fast and that staff evaluations were changing too dramatically. Sudo's clashes with TEPCO president Hirose, who had worked up the ranks and was initially considered pro-reform, grew increasingly serious.

There was an incident in the spring of 2016 that could be considered a prelude to current conflicts. Sudo and METI, unhappy with the fact that Hirose would not cut his ties with former management, tried to reappoint him to the post of deputy chairman. Hirose resisted and, according to multiple sources involved with TEPCO, was able to get the support of a former TEPCO executive who had close ties with the prime minister's office. As a result, Hirose stayed in his post as company president, but his relationship with Sudo deteriorated beyond the point of repair. "It wasn't uncommon for the two to criticize each other openly at management meetings," a senior TEPCO official said.

At the end of 2016, METI announced that the amount of money necessary to deal with the nuclear crisis would be about 21.5 trillion yen, almost twice the amount of an earlier estimate. Because of the need to secure more funds, the government set up an expert panel, which then offered "recommendations" to TEPCO on how to rebuild its finances. When it was revealed that "the passing of authority down to the next generation" was one of the pieces of advice offered by the panel, industry insiders saw it as another government attempt at bringing Hirose down from his post, a source close to the case said.

Hirose is said to have resisted strongly to such renewed efforts. However, Sudo vowed that he would step down if Hirose did, forcing Hirose to bow to the pressure to resign. Some in the electric power industry have described the latest personnel reshuffle a "tie" in that both "camps" made concessions, but discontent is already spreading among career TEPCO employees. According to a senior TEPCO official, new executives, including Kobayakawa and the new president of a subsidiary company, are "all drinking buddies of outside board members who are former METI bureaucrats."

TEPCO can't afford to waste time on personnel feuds. In order to come up with the money needed to bring the troubled reactors under control, TEPCO must earn 500 billion yen per year for the next 30 years. The amount goes up further when taking into account the funds needed for capital investment. Meanwhile, TEPCO's consolidated financial results for fiscal 2016 stood at just 258.6 billion yen in operating income. TEPCO's outline of its latest reorganization plan shows that it is aiming to raise earning power by realigning its various businesses, such as nuclear power, as well as the transmission and distribution of power, with other utilities. However, this plan is a carbon copy of the recommendations given by the government-established expert panel. Some long-time TEPCO employees have said the company only included the recommendation into its reorganization plan because the government has been on its back to do so, and that because other utilities will find no benefit to them in restructuring with TEPCO, the plan will never come to fruition. If people in the company remain this divided, TEPCO will never be able to follow through with rigorous reforms.

If TEPCO drops the ball on management reform and is unable to come up with the money it needs, it could lead to further burdens on the public in the form of higher electricity prices. **TEPCO, under normal circumstances, would have gone under following the onset nuclear disaster.** So if things go further

south, not just the utility, but the central government, which allowed the utility to survive by pumping 1 trillion yen from national coffers into the company, will be held accountable.

Kawamura, who will be appointed TEPCO's new chairman at the company's general meeting of shareholders in late June, has the experience of having accomplished Hitachi's v-shaped turnaround through fundamental management reforms. While his appointment was initiated by the government, many TEPCO employees welcome Kawamura's pending appointment. The latest personnel change may be the last chance for TEPCO and the government to put its differences aside toward the goal of rebuilding the troubled power company.

Looking back at the latest personnel power struggle, a senior TEPCO official said, "I'm embarrassed when asked if any of the people involved (in the debacle) had 'our responsibility toward Fukushima' in mind."

The government and TEPCO must not forget its responsibility toward the victims of the nuclear disaster. If they focused on the fact that there are people out there whose peaceful lives in their beloved hometowns were taken away from them, they could refrain from feuds over personnel appointments. (By Daisuke Oka, Business News Department)

Playing on fears

May 15, 2017

Rising demand for air purifiers, nuclear shelters as threat looms

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201705150036.html>

By MOTOFUMI WATANABE/ Staff Writer

HABIKINO, Osaka Prefecture--Sales of nuclear shelters and radiation-blocking air purifiers have surged in Japan in recent months as fears grow over North Korea's development of its nuclear missile capabilities. Osaka-based Shelter Co., which sells shelters and provides housing reinforcements against natural disasters including earthquakes, sold 10 Swiss-made air purifiers in March and April alone, compared with the 55 years it took to sell the previous 10 units, starting in 1962.

"It is bad that the threat from our neighbor country is rising. I hope the world will become a place where those kinds of emergency preparations are not needed," said Shelter President Seiichiro Nishimoto, 80.

The niche industry company has been overwhelmed with customer demand to set up the systems immediately, especially since Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on April 13 in the Diet warned of the dangers of North Korea's capability to fire a sarin nerve gas-loaded missile toward Japan.

A Swiss-made air purifier can easily be installed in an apartment costing from 1.8 million yen (\$15,900) to 2.8 million yen. The units boast of their capability to remove chemical substances and radioactive materials contained in the air coming from outside, according to a Shelter spokesperson.

Meanwhile, it takes several months to set up an underground shelter with steel-reinforced concrete, which costs 1.5 million yen or more for a space of 3.3 square meters. A shelter large enough to comfortably accommodate about a dozen people requires about 10 million yen.

Oribe Seiki Seisakusho Co. (Oribe accurate instrument producing company), which markets nuclear shelters in a variety of sizes, has also experienced soaring sales.

The Kobe-based company used to receive only about 10 orders for underground concrete-made nuclear shelters equipped with an air purifying function annually, but received 12 orders within a single month, April, for a shelter package that costs about 25 million yen, according to Nobuko Oribe, 73, company director.

Trying to dispel negative rumors

May 21, 2017

Fast-selling yogurt helps fund education in Fukushima

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201705210006.html>

By HIROKI KOIZUMI/ Staff Writer

MOTOMIYA, Fukushima Prefecture--New yogurt products made here are shooting up in popularity, and **developers hope they will help dispel negative publicity surrounding foodstuffs following the 2011 nuclear disaster.**

The lactic acid bacteria used in the products was discovered by University of Tokyo researcher Kazuhisa Sekimizu, who developed the products jointly with a dairy company in Motomiya.

One yen (1 cent) each from the proceeds of a unit sold is being **donated to fund the education of local children**, who will be the central players in post-disaster rebuilding work.

Tohoku Kyodo Milk Industry Co. donated about 3,000 units of one of its yogurt products in late April to 10 elementary and junior high schools in Motomiya.

"This yogurt product embodies strong passion for helping the education of people like you, who will be working to rebuild Fukushima Prefecture," Tohoku Kyodo Milk Industry President Hiroshi Imahase told schoolchildren during his visit to Motomiya Elementary School.

The company developed two yogurt products made with a lactic bacterium strain discovered by Sekimizu, formerly a professor of microbiology with the University of Tokyo's Graduate School of Pharmaceutical Sciences and now a professor emeritus.

The products were put on sale in July 2014 and April 2015, respectively.

Their sales grew from year to year and reached about 600,000 units in fiscal 2016. The company donated about 600,000 yen to parties including the Fukushima prefectural government and the Motomiya city government for the purchasing of books.

After the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in 2011, Sekimizu thought about how he could help disaster-affected communities, which were suffering from a negative public image due to radiation fears.

Sekimizu gathered some 10,000 bacterium strains from soil on a University of Tokyo campus, a slug, kimchi and other media. **The lactic bacterium strain collected from kiwi fruit rind was found to be the most effective in stimulating immunity.**

The scientist used that strain to make yogurt on his own, which he took with himself when he visited the offices of Tohoku Kyodo Milk Industry in 2013. He asked Imahase to taste it and approached him with a proposal for joint product development.

Negative publicity from the nuclear disaster had taken a big toll on Tohoku Kyodo Milk Industry. The sales of milk, the company's mainstay product, had plummeted to less than half the pre-disaster levels, and the company had difficulties in coming up with development funds.

Sekimizu's enthusiasm, however, won over company officials, who decided to proceed with product development.

"New strains of lactic acid bacteria are being found one after another," Sekimizu said. "I hope to continue helping to spread word about Fukushima Prefecture's dairy farming on a global level."

Tablets for remote medical care

May 19, 2017

Minamisoma starts remote medical care services using tablets

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/05/19/national/science-health/minamisoma-starts-remote-medical-care-services-using-tablets/#.WSGxndykKic>

JJI

MINAMISOME, FUKUSHIMA PREF. – The Minamisoma Municipal Government in Fukushima Prefecture said Thursday it has started **remote medical care services at a city hospital using tablet computers.**

The hospital is located in the city's Odaka district, where an evacuation instruction issued following the March 2011 triple meltdown at Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant was lifted in July last year.

A majority of the residents who returned to their homes in the district are older people.

Against this background, the city decided to provide home medical care services **for those who find it difficult to go to the hospital.**

Tokyo-based medical information service provider Medley Inc. and major mobile phone carrier KDDI Corp. offered their support to launch the services.

Patients can receive checks and advice by doctors through a tablet computer brought to their homes by a nurse. They also can pay for the services, including fees for prescribed drugs to be sent later by mail, with the tablets.

Rice farming in Fukushima

May 23, 2017

Trial rice farming begins in a Fukushima town

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20170523_36/

Rice farming resumed on Tuesday in a town near the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, for the first time since the 2011 accident.

The trial farm in Tomioka Town is aimed at confirming the safety of rice grown in the area and resuming sales. Rice shipments from the town are currently restricted. Evacuation orders for most areas of the town were lifted last month.

Farmer Noboru Watanabe is planning to grow rice in a small paddy as part of the trial. The 56-year-old farmer now lives in Iwaki City in the prefecture.

On Tuesday, he returned briefly to Tomioka with his wife Satomi to plant seedlings.

The surface of the paddy had been removed for decontamination and re-filled with sand. Chemicals have been applied to improve the soil.

Watanabe said he is happy to feel like a farmer again, but that he is anxious about whether the rice will grow favorably. He pledged to manage his paddy well.

The song of the deserted school

May 22, 2017

Graduates continue singing alma mater of closed Fukushima Pref. high school

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170522/p2a/00m/0na/005000c>

TOMIOKA, Fukushima -- The voices of graduates singing their alma mater filled the empty building of this town's public high school on May 21, closed since the 2011 nuclear disaster.

Graduates of Tomioka High School have continued to gather once a month since the autumn of 2015 to sing the song of the deserted school. Former principal, 69-year-old Yoshiko Aoki, received inspiration for the project after being moved hearing graduates sing the school song when she visited the grounds after the outbreak of the 2011 nuclear accident. The movement is gradually expanding, as many residents have children or grandchildren who graduated from the school, and are therefore familiar with the song.

Residents are slowly making their return to Tomioka after the evacuation order for the majority of the town was lifted this April. The townspeople intend to continue to sing the song until the day the school can reopen.

When children have to be taught to laugh

May 24, 2017

In Fukushima, children are being taught to laugh out loud

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201705240001.html>

By TAKUYA IKEDA/ Staff Writer

AIZU-WAKAMATSU, Fukushima Prefecture--Comedy education is being offered at schools in this part of Japan that is still getting over the 2011 nuclear disaster, and that's no joke.

The Okuma board of education in the prefecture has been giving serious attention to **ways of making the children of evacuees laugh spontaneously to help them improve their communications skills and self-expression.**

The special classes are now under way at three town-run elementary and junior high schools temporarily set up in Aizu-Wakamatsu, which is situated a safe distance from the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

An evacuation order remains in effect for all the residents of Okuma.

Okuma's board of education set up a panel for comedy-based education for schools on April 28 as all the town's children are still living as evacuees more than six years after the nuclear crisis triggered by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster that ravaged northeastern Japan.

Working with Osaka-based Yoshimoto Kogyo Co., which represents artists and has many famous comedians on its books, the education board stated that it was committed to bringing "smiles" to the faces of more children uprooted from their homes.

The focus of the classes is on Japan's "manzai" traditional style of stand-up comedy.

The children are taught by agency entertainers how to develop manzai scripts and perform by themselves in front of others.

The course runs for a total of eight hours.

A meeting of the panel held April 28 at the temporary branch office of the Okuma town government in Aizu-Wakamatsu was attended by school principals, parents and their children.

"Principals should make people laugh at least once a day," said Toshihide Takeuchi, head of the education board.

"Teachers who cannot make students smile in classes will be arrested," he deadpanned to laughter from the audience.

A key objective is to ease children's anxieties.

"Many children feel exhausted at home," Takeuchi said. "They appreciate what adults are doing to help them, but they also are evacuees. These children work very hard, trying to live up to adults' expectations." Takeuchi expressed his hope that the comedy program will help children to laugh and relax.

The education board said it wanted children to realize that making a fool of others or running down someone perceived to have some sort of defect does not constitute "enjoyable laughing."

Similar efforts are being made elsewhere in Fukushima Prefecture.

Elementary schools in the village of Iitate began offering special classes combining manzai with education during the last fiscal year.

Sixth-graders at three village-run elementary schools learned how to play the fool in manzai from performers of entertainer agency Shochiku Geino Co., also based in Osaka, last fall at temporary buildings in Kawamata, where many evacuees now reside.

Last year, the city-run Daini Junior High School and Kawahigashi Junior High School in Aizu-Wakamatsu also offered manzai classes based on a nine-hour education plan developed by a city-based nonprofit group called Aizu Engine that focuses on social education.

Penguin Nuts, a comic duo that works primarily in the prefecture, served as teachers along with others during the special classes. Students formed comic duos themselves and competed with each other to make people laugh.

The two schools said the “effects” of the comedy-based education are already apparent as more children feel able to express their opinions directly to teachers and classmates.

Apologising for bullying

June 1, 2017

Yokohama mayor apologizes to schoolboy bullied for being nuclear evacuee

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/06/01/national/social-issues/yokohama-mayor-apologizes-boy-bullied-fukushima-nuclear-evacuee/#.WTBjp9ykJLM>

Kyodo

YOKOKAMA – Yokohama Mayor Fumiko Hayashi apologized to a 13-year-old boy for the municipal government’s failure to act swiftly when he was bullied in elementary school for being a nuclear evacuee from Fukushima Prefecture.

The mayor said Wednesday that she vowed to the boy, now in junior high school, and to his mother to more seriously tackle bullying.

After his case surfaced last November, a slew of similar incidents in other parts of the country came to light, prompting the central government to request that schools with evacuees from Fukushima, the center of the 2011 nuclear disaster, check to see whether they had been discriminated against.

In the Yokohama case, the bullying began after the second-grader transferred to a Yokohama elementary school in 2011. He was called “germ” as a reference to nuclear contamination by his teacher and forked over ¥1.5 million (\$13,500) in apparent extortion fees to his classmates.

A board of education investigation concluded the boy had been bullied, and the board later acknowledged the payments resulted from the bullying.

In a 15-minute meeting with the mayor at City Hall, the boy said: “Unless bullying is recognized (by authorities), we feel as if no one will fight together with us. I don’t want anyone to suffer the way I did,” according to a lawyer representing the student.

The mayor said she told the boy and his mother, “We will side with the feelings of the children from now on.”

Yuko Okada, head of the board of education, apologized at the meeting as well.

The boy’s mother said she hopes the case will reform the way the city deals with the problem in the school system.

The government released in April its first nationwide survey on the bullying of child evacuees from Fukushima and found 129 cases had transpired in the academic year ended in March and 70 more in previous years.

Among the 199 cases, 13 had obvious links to the man-made nuclear disaster or the mega-quake and tsunami that triggered it.

The survey showed that some of those who were bullied were told to go back to Fukushima or stay away under the false premise that they would contaminate others with radiation.

Fukushima farmers slow to restart (NHK video)

June 7, 2017

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20170609_15/

Fukushima Farmers Slow to Restart

A first: TEPCO to compensate Namie

June 6, 2017

Fukushima town to receive compensation

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20170606_03/

NHK has learned that a town near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant is to receive compensation for a drop in the value of its land that was caused by the 2011 nuclear accident.

The plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company, will pay Namie Town 2.5 billion yen, or more than 22 million dollars.

This is the first time that the operator has agreed to compensate a municipality for assets that were affected by the accident.

In June of last year, Namie officials asked the company to pay about 104 million dollars in compensation for damage to 262 hectares of land owned by the town. Evacuation orders for parts of the town remained in effect for over 6 years.

The officials say they will negotiate with the power company over the remainder of the requested amount.

The Fukushima prefectural government says the town of Futaba has made a similar request and that other

municipalities may follow suit.

Tokyo Electric is paying individuals and businesses compensation for damage to properties located in areas where evacuation orders were issued.

Radiation safety limits exceeded in several schools



June 13, 2017

Radiation levels exceeding state-set limit found on grounds of five Chiba schools

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/06/13/national/science-health/radiation-levels-exceeding-state-set-safety-limit-found-grounds-five-chiba-schools/#.WUA4ndykJLM>

yodo, Staff Report

Radiation levels exceeding the government-set safety limit of 0.23 microsieverts per hour have been detected on the grounds of five schools in the city of Kashiwa, Chiba Prefecture, the prefectural board of education said Monday.

Between late April and mid-May, the board officials detected **radiation levels of up to 0.72 microsieverts per hour in certain areas of the schools, including Kashiwa High School and Kashiwa Chuo High School.**

The areas — including soil near a school swimming pool and drainage gutters — are not frequented by students, but the board closed them off and will work to quickly decontaminate them, the officials said.

Kashiwa has been one of the areas with high radiation readings since the 2011 nuclear disaster at Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc.'s Fukushima No. 1 power plant.

According to NHK, the board of education had been checking the soil on the school premises in Kashiwa after radiation levels beyond the state limit were detected in shrubbery near the city's public gymnasium. The board will announce the results of radiation tests at other schools in the prefecture around the end of July, NHK reported.

EU-Japan EPA: Lift Fukushima food restrictions?

July 7, 2017

EU hopeful of EPA, may ease Fukushima restrictions

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20170707_05/

The European Union has expressed hope for an Economic Partnership Agreement with Japan. The bloc may also ease restrictions on food imports from the country's northeastern prefecture of Fukushima.

In a meeting in Brussels on Thursday, European Council President Donald Tusk and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe confirmed a broad deal on the bilateral EPA.

The European Commission later released a statement, saying the EPA will be the most important bilateral trade agreement ever concluded by the EU.

The statement says the EPA could increase the value of exports from the EU by as much as 20 billion euros, or about 22.8 billion dollars, meaning more possibilities and jobs in many EU sectors.

The statement says tariffs on wine imports from the EU will disappear from day one of entry into force and that wine producers will be able to save 134 million euros, or roughly 152 million dollars, a year.

The statement says the EPA will remove the vast majority of duties paid by EU companies, which sum up to one billion euros, or around 1.14 billion dollars, annually.

At a news conference on Thursday, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker referred to the EU's restrictions on rice and other food imports from Fukushima.

Juncker said he is confident and will work for the EU to further lift the import measures after the summer break.

The restrictions followed the 2011 nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant in the prefecture. They require Japan to show that food products from Fukushima have cleared safety checks.

Miyagi beach reopens after 6 years



The Sun Ole Sodehama beach on April 27, 2011, in Minami-Sanriku, Miyagi Prefecture (Provided by the Minami-Sanriku town government)

Disaster-struck beach to reopen in Miyagi after 6 summers closed

By YUSUKE YAMADA/ Staff Writer

MINAMI-SANRIKU, Miyagi Prefecture--A beach here will reopen to swimmers and bathers for the first time since it was closed after the nuclear disaster triggered by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

"Local children have drifted away from the sea after the disaster," said an official of the Minami-Sanriku-Cho Tourism Association, which manages the Sun Ole Sodehama beach. "I want to revitalize the region as the town of the ocean."

Sun Ole Sodehama will be the sixth swimming area open in Miyagi Prefecture this summer, being added to those in Kesenuma, Ishinomaki, Higashi-Matsushima, Shiogama and Shichigahama.

The results of a water quality survey that covers bathing beaches and were released by the prefectural government showed readings for radioactive cesium are below detectable levels, and the water is clean enough for swimming in all the six municipalities.

The Environment Ministry also evaluates water quality based on transparency levels and other criteria. While the beaches in Ishinomaki and Higashi-Matsushima are recognized as being "very good," or "AA" quality, those in Kesenuma and Minami-Sanriku are ranked at "A," which means the water quality is "good."

The swimming areas in Shiogama and Shichigahama are ranked "B."

Sun Ole Sodehama, opening for the first time in more than six years, boasts a 300-meter artificially made sandy beach and was flooded with families from in and outside the town before the disaster.

According to the town government, an average 37,000 people visited the beach annually over the five years until the earthquake.

The disaster caused the swimming area to suffer land subsidence and most parts of the sandy beach were swept away by the tsunami.

The prefectural government in May last year started efforts to reconstruct the beach, such as transporting 6,000 truckloads of sand, or 30,000 cubic meters, to the area. The rebuilding work was completed in late June and the beach is expected to open July 15. According to tourism association officials, three seaside restaurants as well as shops will be open this summer.

Usuiso Beach reopened

July 15, 2017

Fukushima's top beach welcomes swimmers for 1st time since 3/11

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201707150031.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

IWAKI, Fukushima Prefecture--Usuiso beach, once regarded as one of the 100 most beautiful seashores in Japan, welcomed its first holidaymakers in seven years July 15.

Before the 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster that triggered the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, Usuiso drew the most visitors of any beach in Fukushima Prefecture.

Each summer, beaches around Japan hold elaborate ceremonies to welcome visitors to the start of the swimming season. Usuiso held its ceremony July 15.

The 2011 disaster claimed the lives of more than 120 local residents.

Towering tsunami devastated the community, leaving mountains of debris.

As a result, people living in the area campaigned for the construction of a protective coastal levee. They also set about establishing evacuation routes from the beach.

Another concern was the level of radiation on the beach and in local waters. **Residents have received assurances that levels have returned to what they were before the accident.**

Those efforts led to the reopening of the Usuiso beach this year. The beach will be open until Aug. 15.

After the beach was officially declared open, more than 100 senior high school students ran screaming with joy for a plunge in the ocean.

Rest house operators along the beach are keeping their fingers crossed that Usuiso will regain its reputation as the most popular beach in Fukushima Prefecture.

Boar leather: What about radiation?

July 16, 2017

Date goes whole hog into boar leather business in Fukushima

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/07/16/national/date-goes-whole-hog-boar-leather-business-fukushima/#.WWtIPVFpyos>

Fukushima Minpo

Wild boar leather is said to breathe well and resist chafing. It is used in Date, Fukushima Prefecture, to make products like babies' first walking shoes because it is soft and fits well.

In the leather workshop at Dateshi Noringyo Shinko Kosha (Date Agriculture and Forestry Promotion Public Corp.) in the city's Ryozen district, one can hear the comforting sound of rubbing leather parts. Workers are carefully stitching the parts together and nailing on the metal parts using presses. Its business of selling wild boar leather products under the brand name Ino Date is gradually catching on, with the main products, including key fobs and babies' walking shoes, proving so popular that production can't keep up with demand. The products are sold at the local inn Ryozen Kosaikan, Hobara Station on the Abukuma Express Line, and Ubuka no Sato — a public bath in the town of Kori in the prefecture. The wild boar are captured by local hunters, and their skin goes through radiation testing before and after tanning to confirm safety.

The corporation initially wanted to sell the meat, but they had to give up on the idea because eating wild boar caught in the area was banned after the 2011 core meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant. They came up with the idea of developing leather products after learning about a company in Tokyo's Sumida Ward that tans wild animal hides. After repeated talks with representatives from the local tourism industry, the corporation began selling leather products in April 2015. It currently employs seven staffers and 16 artisans for the project.

As the government continues to ban shipments of wild animal meat from the region due to radiation concerns, the boar population is growing and causing serious crop damage. Over 1,800 of them have been captured in the city in the six years since the meltdowns.

The corporation posted ¥3.54 million in leather sales last year but is having trouble cutting costs, including payments for hunters and tanners.

"Recognition of wild boar leather products is still low," said the corporation's secretary-general, Katsunori Sagawa, 53. "We are determined to go headlong, like a boar, into strengthening our brand and expanding our sales channels."

This section, appearing every third Monday, features topics and issues covered by the Fukushima Minpo, the largest newspaper in Fukushima Prefecture. The original article was published on June 21.

TEPCO makes fishermen angry

July 20, 2017

TEPCO chairman incurs fishermen's anger

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20170720_02/

The chairman of Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO, has denied a media claim that the firm has decided to release radioactive water at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant into the ocean.

The utility has been struggling with the huge amount of radioactive water that has been accumulating at the plant after the 2011 nuclear accident. The water contains radioactive tritium.

Some media outlets have reported that TEPCO Chairman Takashi Kawamura said the company has already decided to release the contaminated water into the sea after reducing the concentration of tritium below the government limit.

The head of Japan's fishermen federation, Hiroshi Kishi, met Kawamura on Wednesday and protested his reported remark, saying it was extremely regrettable.

Kishi strongly urged Kawamura not to discharge radioactive water into the sea without the consent of fishermen and the public.

Kawamura said the company has not decided to release tritium-contaminated water into the ocean.

Kawamura said media mistook the intention behind his remark. But he apologized for causing worry and inconvenience to fishermen.

IPPNW: Thyroid tests in Fukushima must be continued (Alex Rosen)

Aus dem IPPNW-Atomenergie-Newsletter Juli 2017

Die Schilddrüsenuntersuchungen in Fukushima müssen weitergehen

<https://www.ippnw.de/atomenergie/gesundheit/artikel/de/die-schilddruesenuntersuchungen-in-f.html>
12.07.2017

Am 5. Juni veröffentlichte die Fukushima Medical University (FMU) die neuesten Zahlen ihrer laufenden Schilddrüsenuntersuchungen. Seit 2011 werden bei Menschen in der Präfektur Fukushima, die zum Zeitpunkt der Kernschmelzen unter 18 Jahre alt waren, alle zwei Jahre die Schilddrüsen untersucht. Ursprünglich begonnen, um die Sorgen der Bevölkerung über gesundheitliche Folgen der Atomkatastrophe zu zerstreuen, haben die Untersuchungen mittlerweile besorgniserregende Ergebnisse zu Tage gefördert. Auch in der aktuellen Veröffentlichung muss wieder eine unerwartet hohe Anzahl neuer Schilddrüsenkrebsfälle bei Kindern verzeichnet werden. Diesmal waren es sechs neue Fälle, die seit der letzten Veröffentlichung im Dezember 2016 gefunden wurden.

152 bestätigte Krebsfälle, 38 Kinder warten noch auf OP

Laut Datenbank des Japanischen Krebsregisters betrug die Neuerkrankungsrate (Inzidenz) von kindlichem Schilddrüsenkrebs vor der Atomkatastrophe rund 0,35 pro 100.000 Kinder pro Jahr. Bei einer pädiatrischen Bevölkerung von rund 360.000 wären in der Präfektur Fukushima somit ca. eine einzige Neuerkrankung pro Jahr zu erwarten gewesen. Tatsächlich sind seit den multiplen Kernschmelzen im Atomkraftwerk Fukushima Dai-ichi mittlerweile bei 191 Kindern in der Feinnadelbiopsie Krebszellen gefunden worden. 153 von ihnen mussten aufgrund eines rasanten Tumorwachstums, einer ausgeprägten Metastasierung oder einer Gefährdung vitaler Organe mittlerweile operiert werden. In 152 Fällen bestätigte sich die feingewebliche Verdachtsdiagnose „Schilddrüsenkrebs“, in nur einem Fall lag ein gutartiger Tumor vor. 38 Kinder warten weiterhin auf eine Operation.

Anzahl der Neuerkrankungen deutlich erhöht

Besorgniserregend ist bei der Publikation der neuen Daten vor allem die Zahl der Krebsfälle, die bei Kindern gefunden wurden, die vor zwei Jahren noch keine Auffälligkeiten hatten. In der zweiten Untersuchungsrunde wurden beispielsweise 49 Krebsfälle bestätigt – allesamt bei Kindern, die bei der Untersuchung zwei Jahre zuvor noch keine krebverdächtigen Strukturen in der Schilddrüse hatten. 49 Neuerkrankungen in 2 Jahren entspricht 24,5 Fällen im Jahr. Bei einer bislang untersuchten Bevölkerung von 270.497 Kindern (71% der geplanten Anzahl von Untersuchungen) sehen wir während des Zeitraums von April 2014 und März 2016 somit eine Neuerkrankungsrate von rund 9 Fällen pro 100.000 Kinder pro

Jahr. Noch stehen rund 30% aller Ergebnisse aus der Zweituntersuchung aus, aber sollte sich dieser Trend bestätigen (und danach sieht es der Tendenz des letzten Jahres aus), würde dies einem rund 26-fachen Anstieg der Neuerkrankungsrate entsprechen. Dieses Ergebnis ist höchst signifikant und lässt sich aufgrund der eindeutigen Voruntersuchungen aller Patienten auch nicht durch einen Screening-Effekt erklären oder relativieren.

Erste Daten aus der dritten Untersuchungsrunde veröffentlicht

Auch die ersten Daten der dritten Untersuchungsrunde wurden im Juni veröffentlicht. Bei den mittlerweile 105.966 untersuchten Kindern (31,5% der geplanten Anzahl von Untersuchungen) wurde bei 65,2% Knoten oder Zysten in der Schilddrüse gefunden. Bei der Zweituntersuchung zwei Jahre zuvor lag diese Quote noch bei 59,8%, bei der Erstuntersuchung sogar nur bei 48,5%. Dies entspricht einer durchschnittlichen Zunahme der Anzahl von Knoten oder Zysten im Ultraschall von ca. 2,7% pro Jahr, wobei ein Teil der Daten der zweiten und ein Großteil der Daten der dritten Untersuchungsrunde noch ausstehen. Allgemein kann jedoch festgestellt werden, dass die relative Zahl der Kinder mit auffälligen Schilddrüsenbefunden in der Präfektur Fukushima in den vergangenen sechs Jahren kontinuierlich gestiegen ist. Auch kamen in der dritten Untersuchungsrunde vier neue Verdachtsfälle hinzu, von denen sich zwei mittlerweile durch Operationen sichern ließen.

Untersuchungen werden unterminiert

Insgesamt ist festzuhalten, dass die Daten der Schilddrüsenuntersuchungen der FMU zunehmend komplexer werden. Dies ist zum Teil des Aufbaus der Untersuchungen geschuldet: zeitlich überlappende Untersuchungsrounden, die vorsehen, jedes Kind alle zwei Jahre zu untersuchen, bei denen jede Runde sich allerdings über zwei bis drei Jahre zieht und nach Regionen gestaffelt durchgeführt wird. Ein weiterer Faktor sind jedoch die offenkundigen Bestrebungen der Atomwirtschaft und der FMU, die Studie und ihre Aussagekraft zu unterminieren. So sollen die Untersuchungsintervalle entgegen ursprünglicher Pläne und Ankündigungen ab dem 25. Lebensjahr von 2 auf 5 Jahre ausgeweitet werden. Wichtige Informationen zu den operierten Fällen, die der statistischen Aufarbeitung und der Ursachenforschung dienlich wären, werden weiterhin nicht veröffentlicht. So wird es immer schwieriger, aus den publizierten Zahlen epidemiologische Schlüsse zu ziehen.

Hinzu kommt, dass die Teilnahmeraten an den Untersuchungen abnehmen. Gründe könnten sein, dass Mitarbeiter der FMU an Schulen gehen und dort Kinder über deren „Recht zur Nichtteilnahme“ und dem „Recht zum Nichtwissen“ „aufklären“ oder dass ab dem Erreichen des 18. Lebensjahres die Kosten der Untersuchungen nicht mehr vollständig erstattet, sondern von den Patienten und deren Familien selbst erbracht werden müssen (wir berichteten). Dies führt zu einer systemischen Verzerrung der Testergebnisse, die langfristig die gesamte Studie entwerten könnte – eine Konsequenz, die der, um ihr Überleben kämpfenden, japanischen Atomindustrie nicht gerade unlieb sein dürfte.

Der Fall des verschwiegenen Krebsfalls

Schon jetzt übt die Internationale Atomenergieorganisation IAEA direkten Einfluss auf die Durchführung der Studie an der FMU aus. Diese Entwicklung dürfte sich in der Zukunft noch verstärken. Ein besonders gravierender Fall der Datenmanipulation wurde Anfang des Jahres bekannt, als die Familie eines an Schilddrüsenkrebs erkrankten Kindes aus der Präfektur Fukushima an die Öffentlichkeit ging und monierte, dass der Fall ihres Kindes in den offiziellen Daten der FMU nicht auftauchte. Die Studienleitung argumentierte, dass die Diagnose des Kindes nicht durch sie gestellt worden war, sondern durch eine kooperierende Klinik, an die der Junge zur weiteren Diagnostik und Therapie überwiesen wurde. Dass der

Junge zum Zeitpunkt der Kernschmelzen in Fukushima gelebt hatte, in die Reihenuntersuchung der FMU aufgenommen war und aufgrund einer neu diagnostizierten Schilddrüsenkrebserkrankung operiert werden musste, wurde von den Datensammlern offenbar nicht für relevant gehalten. Wie viele weitere Fälle von Schilddrüsenkrebs bei Kindern ebenfalls nicht berichtet wurden, wie viele Fälle außerhalb der Grenzen der Präfektur auftraten oder bei Menschen, die zum Zeitpunkt der Kernschmelzen bereits über 18 Jahre alt waren, all das wird wissenschaftlich nicht untersucht und damit vermutlich nie bekannt werden.

Das Recht auf Gesundheit

Es bleibt festzustellen, dass wir in Fukushima einen signifikanten Anstieg der Neuerkrankungsraten von Schilddrüsenkrebs bei Kindern sehen und dass diese Zahlen zugleich eine systematische Unterschätzung darstellen dürften. Zudem wird auch von einem Anstieg weiterer Krebsarten und anderer Erkrankungen gerechnet, die durch ionisierte Strahlung ausgelöst oder negativ beeinflusst werden. Die Schilddrüsen screenings der FMU stellen die einzigen wissenschaftlich halbwegs soliden Untersuchungen dar, die Aufschlüsse über die gesundheitlichen Folgen der Atomkatastrophe von Fukushima liefern können. Und sie laufen derzeit Gefahr, von den Befürwortern der Atomenergie unterlaufen zu werden. Die Menschen in Japan haben ein Recht auf Gesundheit und ein Recht auf Information. Die Untersuchungen kindlicher Schilddrüsen kommt somit nicht nur den Patienten selber zu Gute, deren Krebserkrankungen frühzeitig detektiert und behandelt werden können, sondern der gesamten Bevölkerung, die durch die freigesetzte Strahlung beeinträchtigt wird. Die korrekte Fortführung und wissenschaftliche Begleitung der Schilddrüsenuntersuchungen liegen somit im öffentlichen Interesse und dürfen nicht durch politische oder wirtschaftliche Beweggründe konterkariert werden.

Dr. med. Alex Rosen
Vorsitzender der IPPNW

Erstuntersuchung (Oktober 2011 – März 2014): 367.649 Kinder	Juni 2017
Untersuchte Kindern:	300.473 (81,7%)
Knoten und Zysten im Ultraschall:	145.868 (48,5%)
Feinnadelbiopsien bei stark auffälligen Ultraschallbefunden:	547
Krebsverdachtsfälle durch Feinnadelbiopsie:	116
Operationen aufgrund von Metastasen oder schnellem Wachstum:	102
Bestätigung der Krebsdiagnose in der Histologie:	101
Gutartige Tumore in der Histologie:	1
Patienten, die noch auf OP warten	14
Errechnete Prävalenz von Schilddrüsenkrebs in der Studienkohorte:	33,6 pro 100.000
Zweituntersuchung (April 2014 - März 2016): 381.256 Kinder	Juni 2017
Untersuchte Kindern:	270.497 (70,9%)
Knoten und Zysten im Ultraschall:	161.801 (59,8%)
Davon neue, die im Erstscreening nicht aufgefallen waren:	
Davon Knoten > 5 mm, bzw. Zysten > 20 mm:	
Verschlechterungen von Stadium A2 auf B	
Feinnadelbiopsien bei stark auffälligen Ultraschallbefunden:	200
Krebsverdachtsfälle durch Feinnadelbiopsie:	71
Operationen aufgrund von Metastasen oder schnellem Wachstum:	49
Bestätigung der Krebsdiagnose in der Histologie:	49
Gutartige Tumore in der Histologie:	0
Patienten, die noch warten:	22
Errechnete Inzidenz von Schilddrüsenkrebs zwischen Erst- und Zweitscreening:	9,1 pro 100.000
Drittuntersuchung (Mai 2016 - März 2018): 336.616	Juni 2017
Untersuchte Kindern:	105.966 (31,5%)
Knoten und Zysten im Ultraschall:	69.038 (65,2%)
Davon neue, die im Erstscreening nicht aufgefallen waren:	
Davon Knoten > 5 mm, bzw. Zysten > 20 mm:	
Verschlechterungen von Stadium A2 auf B	
Feinnadelbiopsien bei stark auffälligen Ultraschallbefunden:	11
Krebsverdachtsfälle durch Feinnadelbiopsie:	4
Operationen aufgrund von Metastasen oder schnellem Wachstum:	2
Bestätigung der Krebsdiagnose in der Histologie:	2
Gutartige Tumore in der Histologie:	0
Patienten, die noch warten:	2
Errechnete Inzidenz von Schilddrüsenkrebs zwischen Erst- und Zweitscreening:	0,9 pro 100.000
Gesamtzahlen:	Juni 2017
Gesamtzahl der Patienten mit Krebsverdacht:	191
Gesamtzahl der Patienten mit Operation:	153
Gesamtzahl der Patienten mit bestätigtem SD-Krebs:	152
Gesamtzahl der Patienten, die auf OP warten:	38

Are nukes compatible with the Constitution?

June 24, 2017

EDITORIAL: Is nuclear power compatible with human rights in Constitution?

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201707240022.html>

One year has passed since an evacuation order was lifted on July 12, 2016, for most parts of the Odaka district of Minami-Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, which lies within a 20-kilometer radius of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Stores and schools in the district are gradually being reopened. Voices of high school students are heard echoing through the streets at times of the day when they go to school and return home. At the same time, though, many stores remain shuttered and grass is running wild in the yards of many houses.

City government figures show that Odaka was home to only 2,046 residents as of July 12, less than one-sixth of the corresponding figure at the time of the 2011 disaster at the nuclear plant, which is operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO).

The nuclear disaster, triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, deprived many people of their “lives as usual,” which should have been guaranteed under the Constitution of Japan.

DISASTER HIGHLIGHTED ESSENTIALS OF CONSTITUTION

Katsuaki Shiga, a 68-year-old fisherman, has given up hope of returning to Odaka.

His home, which he had just built near the coastline, was inundated by the tsunami. The home went dilapidated while he was banned entry to the premises in the wake of the nuclear disaster, and Shiga had no choice but to have it dismantled.

“(The disaster) changed not just my life but also the lives of all people in our community,” Shiga said. “That made me think about the essentials of the Constitution, such as the right to life and fundamental human rights.”

The government of Minami-Soma in May last year distributed a brochure containing the entire text of the Constitution to all households in the city.

Yasuzo Suzuki (1904-1983), a scholar of constitutional law who hailed from Odaka, included an explicit mention of the right to life in a draft outline of Japan’s Constitution, which he worked out immediately after World War II ended in 1945.

“**The people shall have the right to maintain wholesome and cultured living standards,**” the draft said, in a prelude to Article 25 of the current Constitution.

Katsunobu Sakurai, mayor of Minami-Soma, wanted the city’s residents to cast their minds back to a starting point at a time when life had taken a sudden turn for the worse for many of them.

Several tens of thousands of inhabitants of Fukushima Prefecture remain evacuated either within or outside the prefecture’s borders. Countless people have lost their longtime livelihoods or dwellings, which means their freedom to choose and change their residences and to choose their occupations (Article 22), along with their right to own or hold property (Article 29), were severely violated.

Many children were no longer able to attend schools in their hometowns, which means their right to an education (Article 26) was also compromised.

And most importantly, the tragedy drove many people into “disaster-related deaths.”

“The nuclear disaster has made it impossible to maintain the sort of life that is described in the Constitution,” Sakurai said emphatically. “That is unconstitutional, isn’t it?”

CONSTITUTION AS PILLAR AND POST

The Fukui District Court in May 2014 issued an injunction against the planned restart of reactors at Kansai Electric Power Co.’s Oi nuclear plant in a lawsuit filed by residents living near the power-generating facility in Fukui Prefecture.

“The use of nuclear energy is meant to fulfill the socially important functions of generating electric power, but that is inferior in standing to the core part of personal rights in light of the Constitution,” the court said in its decision.

Akiko Morimatsu said she was given hope by that court decision, which based itself on the Constitution.

The 43-year-old heads a group of plaintiffs from the Kansai region in a group lawsuit filed by evacuees from the nuclear disaster, who are demanding compensation from the central government and TEPCO.

Worried about her two young children's exposure to radiation, Morimatsu fled to Osaka from Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture, although the area she was from was not under an evacuation order.

Voluntary evacuees like her, who constitute a minority, have had to face unfriendly eyes both in and outside of Fukushima Prefecture, and have received little help from administrative organs and scanty damage payments from TEPCO.

She said she wondered if she had made the right choice, and she took a fresh look at the Constitution, which she had studied in her student years. She thereupon found such statements as "all peoples of the world have the right to live in peace, free from fear and want" (preamble) and "all of the people shall be respected as individuals" (Article 13).

"This should be the pillar and post for me," Morimatsu said she thought.

She argued that it is up to individual freedom to choose between evacuating and staying, and that all individuals, no matter which option they have chosen, should be granted assistance that allows them to realize the sort of life that is guaranteed under the Constitution.

Seventy years after the Constitution came into force, people are still turning to the supreme law of Japan as a weapon in their fight to win back their "lives as usual." That reality should not be forgotten and should be taken seriously.

CHOICE IS UP TO THE PEOPLE

The use of atomic energy was seldom called into question in light of the Constitution before the Fukushima nuclear disaster occurred.

The development of nuclear power in Japan has been advanced in line with the Atomic Energy Basic Law, which was enacted in 1955, eight years after the Constitution took effect.

The law has the stated goal of the "improvement of the welfare of human society and of the national living standard" and says explicitly that the use of nuclear energy should be limited to "peaceful purposes."

"It used to be taken for granted that the use of nuclear power does not violate the Constitution," said Yoshikazu Sawano, a professor of Constitution studies with the Osaka University of Economics and Law. "The issue was seldom ever discussed within academic circles."

There is probably no doubt that nuclear energy, which can supply large amounts of electric power, has contributed to the economic development of Japan, a country poor in natural resources.

Once there is a nuclear accident, however, that puts the human rights of countless individuals at immediate risk. That danger used to be shrouded under a "safety myth" and was not fully understood by the public.

Even after the Fukushima nuclear disaster affected many people, the central government and electric utilities continue to adhere to their policy of promoting the use of atomic energy.

More than 4 million people are living within a 30-km radius of nuclear power plants across Japan where residents may face evacuation orders in the event of an accident.

The future path of Japan should be reviewed from the perspective of whether the continued use of nuclear power would allow the country to maintain society in a state envisaged by the Constitution.

A national referendum in Austria voted against activating a nuclear power plant, which led the Central European nation to pass a law against building nuclear plants in 1978. Public calls for a phase-out of nuclear power intensified following the 1986 disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in the former Soviet Union, and a ban on the use of atomic power was included explicitly in Austria's Constitution in 1999.

The right to choose the future path of Japan lies with every single member of the country's public, with whom sovereign power resides. There should be broader discussions that take into account of what has taken place during the latest period of a little more than six years.

--The Asahi Shimbun, July 23

Fukushima festival

July 29, 2017

Return of Fukushima festival

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20170729_31/

A traditional summer festival featuring samurai on horseback has begun in the Soma region of Fukushima Prefecture.

A procession of people dressed as samurai warriors was held for the first time in 7 years in the Odaka district of Minamisoma City.

Authorities last year lifted evacuation orders for the district that were issued after the 2011 nuclear accident. Spectators included former residents who had evacuated.

One of them said he was overwhelmed, as he used to watch the parade every year. He said he wants his hometown festival to be successful.

The 3-day event runs through Monday.

Futaba to reopen in 2022?



Bags of contaminated soil are lined up in a neighborhood near JR Futaba Station in Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture. (Asahi Shimbun file photo)

2022 return for evacuees eyed by Fukushima plant co-host town

By KAZUMASA SUGIMURA/ Staff Writer

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201708030040.html>

Futaba, which co-hosts the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, hopes to lose its "ghost town" status in spring 2022 when some residents may be allowed to return after more than a decade living as evacuees.

However, it is envisaged that only about 10 percent of the town will be habitable by then.

The timeline for the return of some evacuees was agreed to by town authorities at a special meeting Aug. 2.

Futaba was the first to present a road map for the return of its residents of the seven municipalities in the prefecture whose access to their jurisdictions is still restricted under the designation of difficult-to-return-to zone by the central government. High levels of radiation still exist there.

Ninety-six percent of Futaba's land falls under the same designation.

The Futaba government has been operating out of Iwaki, also in the prefecture, since residents were ordered to flee after the triple meltdown unfolded at the nuclear plant in March 2011.

Futaba town hall expects to apply soon for state funds for the rebuilding hub project. If it gets the green light, decontamination and construction work will be financed by the central government.

A 555-hectare plot of land around JR Futaba Station will be set aside to build housing and infrastructure for the program.

The area was selected since radiation levels there are comparatively lower than in other parts of the town. Futaba officials are hoping that 2,000 inhabitants will return to live in the town five years after the lifting of the evacuation order around spring 2022.

August 3, 2017

Fukushima town aims to partially lift evacuation order by 2022

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170803/p2a/00m/0na/012000c>

FUTABA, Fukushima -- Town authorities here look to partially lift the evacuation order for the town's so-called "difficult-to-return" zone with high radiation levels emanating from the Fukushima nuclear disaster by sometime around the spring of 2022, town officials disclosed on Aug. 2.

- **【Related】** Japan rates severity of June nuclear exposure accident as level 2
- **【Related】** New proposal suggests removing Fukushima plant's melted nuclear fuel from site

The move by the Futaba Municipal Government marks the first time for a municipality in difficult-to-return zones to have presented a plan to lift an evacuation order. The town of Futaba has been entirely evacuated since the 2011 meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. Six other municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture still have areas designated as difficult-to-return zones.

According to Futaba town officials, the town office has included the plan in an application to be submitted to the central government for recognition of the areas subject to the lifting of the evacuation order as a special hub for disaster recovery, in hopes that local residents can return to their hometowns currently designated as difficult-to-return zones.

A special hub for disaster recovery is stipulated in the revised Act on Special Measures for the Reconstruction and Revitalization of Fukushima. After the central government approves a plan worked out by a local municipality, the state will move ahead with decontamination work and infrastructure development in areas designated as a hub for disaster reconstruction, before lifting the evacuation order for the areas in five years.

Under the Futaba town's plan, the town will call for the development of a 555-hectare area including JR Futaba Station, which accounts for 11 percent of the town's total land area. The town plans to designate the recovery hub mainly in areas where many residents used to live before the onset of the Fukushima nuclear crisis, and to build housing complexes and other facilities there.

In addition, the town is also seeking to lift the no-entry order for the so-called "area preparing for the lifting of an evacuation order" in the northeastern part of the town, where radiation doses are relatively low, by sometime around the end of March 2020. The town plans to invite companies including those engaged in reactor decommissioning at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant to be based there, but does not envisage the return of residents.

Currently, 96 percent of the town of Futaba is designated as a difficult-to-return zone.

Contaminated vehicles left the plant unchecked for 12 days after 3/11

August 9, 2017

Tainted cars left Fukushima compound unchecked

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20170809_01/

The operator of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant says **hundreds of vehicles contaminated with radioactive substances left the compound unchecked in the immediate aftermath of the 2011 accident.**

Tokyo Electric Power Company says that in 2012 it began investigating what had happened to privately

owned vehicles at the plant, and found that about 460 had left the compound.

TEPCO officials located most of them by 2015. **About 190 registered radiation levels that were higher than the government standards.** They managed to track down all 190, but some of them had been sold to new owners.

Some of the cars were so contaminated that the radiation couldn't be measured by equipment capable of detecting levels nearly 10 times greater than the official limits.

Two vehicles remain unaccounted for.

TEPCO says it did not conduct radiation checks of cars leaving the compound for 12 days after the accident started on March 11th, 2011.

The company has apologized for causing concern and says it will keep trying to locate the 2 vehicles.

Excessive radiation detected in vehicles removed from Fukushima nuke plant

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170809/p2a/00m/0na/013000c>

Radiation topping the government-set limit has been detected in about 190 vehicles removed from the premises of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant after the outbreak of the nuclear crisis, it has been learned.

- **【Related】** Fukushima town aims to have evacuation order partially lifted by 2022
- **【Related】** New proposal suggests removing Fukushima plant's melted nuclear fuel from side
- **【Related】** TEPCO releases new footage of suspected melted fuel debris at Fukushima plant

Some of the cars were sold on the used-car market while two others remain unaccounted for, according to plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO).

Approximately 1,700 vehicles were parked on the premises of the power station when the nuclear crisis broke out after it was hit by the powerful earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, TEPCO officials said. Of those, about 600 were owned by employees of TEPCO or companies contracted by the utility. **Over a 12-day period until radiation screenings began on March 23 of that year, people could drive the vehicles out of the premises of the plant without checks.**

The Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry instructed TEPCO in February 2012 to conduct a follow-up probe into the use of these vehicles for fear that next owners of those cars could be exposed to radiation without knowing that the vehicles were contaminated.

The power company conducted a survey on employees and contracted companies that parked their cars on the plant's premises at the time of the accident, and confirmed that about 460 vehicles were brought out of the plant by April 2015. It was learned that radiation levels for around 190 of the vehicles exceeded government-set safety standards, and some of them were found contaminated with radiation nearly 10 times over the limit. **All the vehicles whose radiation levels exceeded the limit were collected from their owners and are now stored on TEPCO's premises situated in a Fukushima Prefecture area designated as a highly contaminated "difficult-to-return zone."**

TEPCO is considering how to dispose of these heavily contaminated vehicles, with an official saying, "We'd like to continue searching for two vehicles that remain unaccounted for and respond to the situation in an appropriate manner."

Tomioka's first festival since 3/11

August 12, 2017

Fukushima town holds festival for first time in 7 years after evacuation orders lifted

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170812/p2a/00m/0na/012000c>

TOMIOKA, Fukushima -- A local summer festival was held in this town on Aug. 11 for the first time in seven years following the lifting of evacuation orders that were implemented in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

Some 400 local residents joined the event. **The town has a population of roughly 13,300, but only about 200 residents have returned since the lifting of evacuation orders** in most parts of the town four months ago. Others have settled in other areas, while some remained concerned about the lack of medical and welfare facilities. Nevertheless, **many locals, including families with children, returned to their hometown on this day to enjoy the traditional summer festival.**

Kanako Inamoto, 24, who now lives with her parents in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Iwaki, performed taiko drums for the first time since she joined a local taiko performing group this past spring. "I will continue to treasure my hometown," she said.

At the finale of the festival, about 1,500 fireworks were shot into the sky to commemorate the victims of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and to pray for disaster recovery. The fireworks show was part of an inter-prefectural event held mainly in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures, and a total of 10,000 fireworks lit up 15 locations.

Visiting family graves

August 14, 2017

Fukushima residents visit family graves

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20170813_14/

Residents of a town in Fukushima Prefecture in northeastern Japan have visited their family graves for the Obon holiday period. The spirits of ancestors supposedly return to household altars during the annual Buddhist festival.

The residents of Tomioka were ordered to evacuate after the 2011 nuclear accident. The evacuation order for most parts of the town was lifted in April.

A former evacuee said she feels lonely in the town, but it's nice to see familiar faces when visiting family graves at the temple.

As of August 1st, about 200 people, or one percent of Tomioka's population, had returned to live there. Some former residents are reluctant to go back because of the lack of jobs and the closure of schools.

See also:

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201708140034.html>

Rescue dog so serve as "ambassador"

August 14, 2017

Disaster-hit Fukushima village names rescue dog a PR ambassador

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/08/14/national/disaster-hit-fukushima-village-names-rescue-dog-pr-ambassador/#.WZK4DsZpyos>

Kyodo, Staff Report

FUKUSHIMA – A village affected by the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster has turned to an unlikely public relations ambassador with the appointment of a locally born search and rescue dog.

The 6-year-old mixed-breed — named Jagaimo (potato) — will be tasked with promoting the Fukushima Prefecture village of Iitate, for which an evacuation order was mostly lifted in March.

In the two-year posting, Jagaimo will participate events designed to promote the village.

At a ceremony on Monday, Jagaimo received a certificate and an ambassador's plate to hang on his collar from Iitate Mayor Norio Kanno. After the ceremony, Jagaimo showed off his skills in a mock rescue operation, successfully locating a trapped victim to applause from the audience.

Jagaimo was born in June 2011, three months after the March 2011 disaster. Because the village was declared off-limits following the disaster, Jagaimo was transferred to the nonprofit Japan Animal Care Center in the city of Gifu in August that year.

In Gifu, Jagaimo was trained to become a rescue dog but failed to pass the test over 10 straight attempts.

On the 11th try in June, Jagaimo finally made it.

"I passed. I'm so happy," said a June 8 entry on a Facebook page established for Jagaimo. "Now I can give the good news to my hometown of Iitate."

Anti-boar cages



Local government workers install a wire fence around a house to keep out wild boars, in Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, on July 27, 2017. (Mainichi)

August 17, 2017

Fukushima nuke disaster evacuees return home to find wildlife has taken over

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170817/p2a/00m/0na/011000c>

FUKUSHIMA -- As evacuation orders for some areas near the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant are gradually rolled back, residents are returning to find that in the some six years since the meltdowns at the plant, wildlife has taken over their hometowns. Looking to reassert human dominion and keep critters out of long-empty homes, a test effort has been launched to fence off entire properties.

Increasing numbers of wild animals were born and have lived their whole lives in the built-up areas of the evacuation zone, where repopulation has gone slowly even after evacuation orders have been lifted, with only around 20 percent of residents returning. There are limits to how many animal interlopers can be exterminated, so efforts have focussed instead on separating wildlife from human settlements -- a trial-and-error process that looks likely to continue for some time.

"Putting humans in cages sounds like a joke, but I'm happy for the fences if they can keep wild boars out," said one woman in her 40s who had returned with her husband to their home in Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, as she took in the new 1.2-meter tall fence enclosing 50 square meters of the property.

The prefectural government and other bodies have begun testing the fencing in 12 municipalities subject to evacuation orders around the Fukushima No. 1 plant -- a development the Namie woman welcomed.

"Wild boars appear basically every night. They come in groups, and try to break into the shed. I've felt scared every day," she said. Based on the results of the test run, the town government will consider setting aside funds for fences around residential areas.

Except for so-called "difficult to return zones" in municipalities including the towns of Okuma and Futaba - - where the Fukushima No. 1 plant is located -- the vast majority of nuclear disaster evacuation orders had been lifted by spring this year. However, boars had already used humans' long absence to move in and

make themselves at home, creating shelters in urban bamboo stands or in tall riverside grass, while civets, raccoons and the like had taken up residence in the ceilings of empty homes. This situation is thought to be one cause of the still very low evacuee return rate.

Across the former evacuation zones, bushes and thickets have been severely trimmed as part of the nuclear decontamination process, and heavily damaged buildings are being torn down, making it harder for animals to hang around. However, the ratio of the animals that have only ever known life in an urban environment is growing. Even if the animals make fewer daylight appearances downtown, getting them to move to the mountains will be no easy task.

In Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture, the town government has entrusted wild animal control to the local hunting association, which has set up traps in about 30 locations. However, more than half of the association's 12 members are aged 60 to 70, while some continue to live outside the town, curtailing the scope of the group's activities.

"The only way forward is to identify places that returning residents use that are also being lived in by animals, and explore efficient, long-term countermeasures," said Kei Okuda of Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology.

Time to lift food ban?

August 17, 2017

Japan asks Hong Kong to lift 3/11 food import ban

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/08/17/business/japan-asks-hong-kong-lift-311-food-import-ban/#.WZV9i8Zpyos>

Jiji

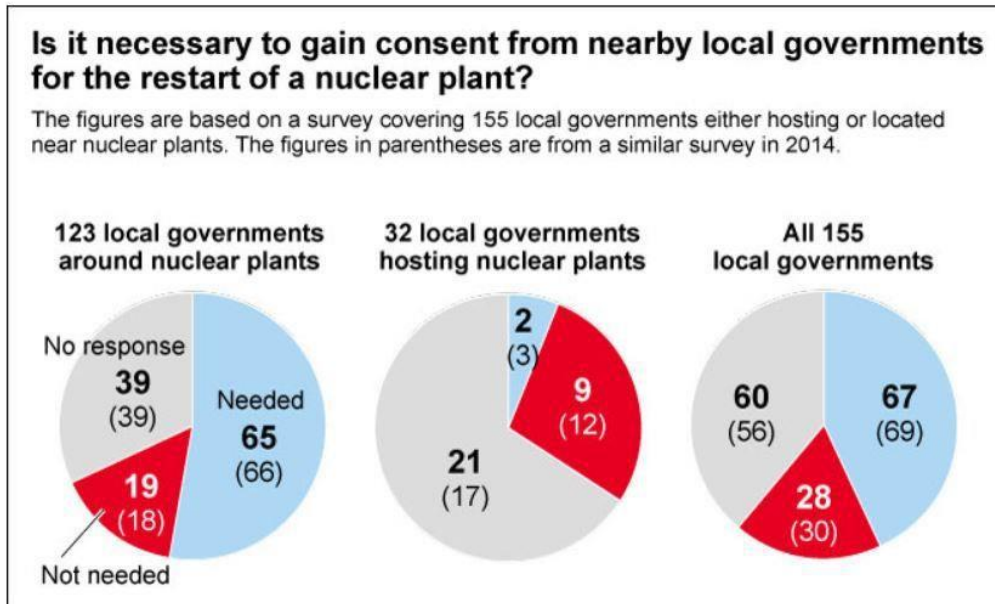
HONG KONG – Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Ken Saito has called on Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam to abolish the Chinese region's import ban on food from five prefectures in eastern Japan.

"I asked the Hong Kong leader to scrap the ban based on scientific grounds," Saito told reporters after holding talks with Lam in Hong Kong on Wednesday.

Following the triple core meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant in March 2011, Hong Kong banned imports of vegetables, fruits and dairy products from Fukushima, Ibaraki, Tochigi, Gunma and Chiba prefectures.

Saito noted that people in Hong Kong are very interested in Japanese food. Hong Kong is a major importer of Japanese agriculture, forestry and fisheries products. Saito expressed confidence that he would be able to expand consumption of Japanese food in the region.

Who should have a say about restarts?



The Asahi Shimbun

August 22, 2017

Municipalities near nuclear plants want say over restarts

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201708210035.html>

More than half of municipalities within a 30-kilometer radius of nuclear power plants insist their approval must be sought for restarts, but only 6 percent of local governments that host such facilities agree.

The finding that 53 percent of municipalities require prior consultations came in a survey by The Asahi Shimbun undertaken two years after a reactor at the Sendai nuclear plant in Kagoshima Prefecture went back online in August 2015, the first to do so under new, more stringent nuclear regulations adopted in the aftermath of the 2011 Fukushima disaster.

The mayor of Hitachiomiya, Ibaraki Prefecture, said local governments beyond host communities "need" to have a say over restarts as the central government revised its nuclear emergency guidelines in 2012 to require municipalities within the 30-km radius to have evacuation plans in place in the event of a serious accident.

Before the Fukushima accident, only local governments within 8-10 km of a nuclear power plant had to do so.

The mayor of Misato, Miyagi Prefecture, said his town's approval should be sought for a restart because a "local government not receiving economic benefits can make a levelheaded judgment on the pros and cons of resumed operations."

Host communities receive grants and subsidies from the central government, in addition to taxes and other revenue sources related to power generation.

In the survey, The Asahi Shimbun contacted the heads of 155 local governments that either host or are situated within a 30-km radius of the 16 nuclear plants across the nation, excluding the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. The figure includes the prefectural government of Hokkaido and 20 other prefectural authorities that host plants.

As things stand, there are no legal steps that an operator of a nuclear facility must take, such as winning the consent of a host municipality or the prefectural government, before a plant's restart.

The Sendai nuclear plant went back online after operator Kyushu Electric Power Co. got the go-ahead only from Satsuma-Sendai, which hosts the plant, and Kagoshima Prefecture for a resumption of operations. The survey found that Mihama, home to Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Mihama nuclear plant, was against the notion of asking nearby municipalities for their approval for a restart.

"Only a host community has a history of contributing to the safe operation of a nuclear plant," the mayor said.

Of all the local governments, 61 heads called for legal procedures to be adopted with respect to restarts. All these calls came from municipalities located in areas surrounding nuclear power plants, except for one. "As long as nuclear energy has been promoted as a state program, the central government should take responsibility for setting the legal framework for a restart," said the mayor of Makinohara, Shizuoka Prefecture.

The mayor of Imari, Saga Prefecture, echoed a similar view.

"Things remain ambiguous because no legal procedures are in place," the mayor said. "The government is reluctant to enshrine the steps into law because that will make restarts harder. However, the central government should also listen to what people in municipalities beyond host communities have to say."

The survey also found that calls for plant operators to gain the consent of the municipalities within a 30-km radius of a proposed restart have somewhat abated among 35 local governments, where nuclear plants have resumed operations.

Ten heads sided with this view in the current survey, down from 13 in the previous survey in autumn 2014.

Another 10 leaders called for setting up legal procedures for restarts, compared with 14 in the last survey. Apart from the Sendai nuclear plant, Ikata in Ehime Prefecture and Takahama in Fukui Prefecture are currently operating.

Municipalities situated close to facilities that are expected to go back online in the near future are now taking a more clear-cut stance on nuclear energy issues.

Representatives from cities around the Genkai nuclear plant in Genkai, Saga Prefecture, formed a group to present a united front against moves to resume its operations, which is expected this winter.

Although the mayors of Hirado and Matsuura, both in Nagasaki Prefecture, did not take a stance in the 2014 survey, they joined the municipalities against the restart in the latest poll, bringing municipalities opposed to the restart to four, or half of the eight local governments within a 30-km radius of the facility. The Genkai town hall and the Saga prefectural government have already agreed to resuming plant operations.

(This article was written by Natsuki Okamura, Rei Inoue and Yusuke Fukui.)

Fukushima deceased evacuees left in limbo

August 24, 2017

No-go zones keep kin from burying deceased Fukushima evacuees at ancestral gravesites

Fukushima, 3/11 fallout forcing remains to be stored at temples, ancestral gravesites to be moved

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/08/24/national/no-go-zones-keep-kin-burying-deceased-fukushima-evacuees-ancestral-gravesites/#.WZ61OsZpyot>

JJI

FUKUSHIMA – The remains of Fukushima’s deceased evacuees are being left in limbo because radiation is preventing them from being buried.

In municipalities that remain off-limits because of the fallout from the triple core meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant in March 2011, the inability of residents to return has put burials for their loved ones on hold.

Instead, many relatives are opting to leave remains in the hands of temples or moved their family graves out of their hometowns.

Choanji, a temple in a no-go zone in the town of Namie, is keeping the remains of about 100 people at a branch facility that was set up in the prefectural capital after the nuclear crisis began.

At the branch, a swordsmanship training room was renovated to enshrine remains that should have been buried in Namie.

“Evacuees don’t want to bury the remains of family members in places with high radiation levels,” said the branch’s chief priest, Shuho Yokoyama, 76.

A 66-year-old resident of Minamisoma visited the temple branch on Aug. 12 for the Bon holidays to pray for her elder sister, who died after evacuating the area.

Her remains are kept there because her family’s grave is located in a no-go zone in Namie; the remains of her sister’s husband, who died before the disaster, are already in the family grave.

“I am sorry that she is separated from her husband. I want their remains to be buried together,” the woman said.

To enter the no-go zone, residents need to submit applications to the municipal government in question. The woman is unhappy with the system as she wants permission to enter the areas freely, at least during Bon, the traditional period for commemorating one’s ancestors. Since the disaster began, she has been unable to visit the grave of her brother-in-law.

At Choanji, 20 percent of some 500 families in the congregation have moved their ancestors’ graves to other areas.

Isao Kanno, 50, who hails from Namie but now lives in Tokyo, was in the area just before the remains of his father, who died two months before the meltdowns, were scheduled to be interred.

“I can’t be evacuated alone and bury the remains in the grave” in a no-go zone, Kanno said.

“I’m considering moving the grave somewhere else.”

Some, however, worry their hometown ties could fade if they move their graves.

“Despite being designated a no-go zone, it is my hometown,” said a 57-year-old Tokyo resident who left the remains of one of his relatives at the temple branch.

“It is the land of my ancestors, so I’ve never considered moving the grave,” he said.

Cut from official lists

August 28, 2017

Elimination of Fukushima evacuees from list slammed

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201708280053.html>

By SHIGEO HIRAI/ Staff Writer

The central government has made a large number of people who voluntarily fled the Fukushima area after the 2011 nuclear disaster disappear by cutting them from official lists of evacuees.

Critics are now condemning the move, which went into effect last April, saying it prevents government officials from fully grasping the picture of all who remain displaced to evaluate their future needs.

“Accurate data on Fukushima evacuees is essential in gaining a better understanding of their current circumstances and crafting measures to address their problems,” said Shun Harada, a sociology researcher at Rikkyo University in Tokyo, who contributes as an editor for an information publication for evacuees living in Saitama Prefecture.

“When only smaller than the real numbers are made available, difficulties facing evacuees could be underestimated and could result in terminating support programs for them,” he complained.

As of July, 89,751 evacuees were living across Japan after fleeing from the nuclear disaster, down by 29,412 from the March tally.

In April, the central government opted to cut “voluntary” evacuees who fled their homes due to fears of radiation despite being from outside the evacuation zone.

It came after the official program to provide free housing to the voluntary evacuees was stopped at the end of March, which was designed to facilitate a prompt return to their hometowns in Fukushima Prefecture. People from the evacuation zone are still eligible to the free housing program.

The central government’s Reconstruction Agency, set up to oversee rebuilding efforts in Japan’s northeastern region after the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster, releases the number of evacuees each month, based on figures compiled by local authorities.

The 29,412 drop in the number of official evacuees between March and July includes 15,709 in Fukushima Prefecture, 6,873 in Miyagi Prefecture, 2,798 in Iwate Prefecture, 780 in Tokyo, 772 in Kanagawa Prefecture and 577 in Saitama Prefecture.

Before the change in housing policy, agency statistics showed a monthly decrease in evacuee numbers of between 3,000 and 4,000 in the several months leading up to the end of March.

But the drop in numbers increased dramatically to 9,493 between March and April and 12,412 between April and May.

Kanagawa and Saitama prefectural officials say voluntary evacuees were responsible for most of the declines in their jurisdictions.

A large number of them are believed to be living in the same housing as before but are now paying their own rent.

A 43-year-old woman who has been evacuating in Saitama Prefecture since fleeing from Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, with three other family members said she is angered by the central government’s treatment.

“We cannot return to Fukushima Prefecture due to fears of the effects of radiation,” she said. “I feel like I have been abandoned by the state by being denied evacuee status.”

An official with the Tokyo-based Japan Civil Network for Disaster Relief in East Japan, a private entity that functions as a liaison unit for a nationwide network of groups supporting victims of the disaster six years ago stressed the need for local authorities to have an accurate understanding of the circumstances surrounding evacuees.

“Of the evacuees, the elderly and single-parent households tend to be left in isolation and many of them are likely to become qualified to receive public assistance in the near future,” the official said. “Local officials need to know they are evacuees (from Fukushima).”

The official added that it will become difficult for support groups to extend their help if voluntary evacuees are taken out of the official tally.

But the Reconstruction Agency said it will not reconsider the definition of evacuees.

Hydrogen for Fukushima

August 29, 2017

Fukushima Prefecture high on hydrogen for greener society

By TERU OKUMURA/ Staff Writer

One of the world's largest hydrogen production plants is planned for the town of Namie, part of efforts to build a hydrogen-based, eco-friendly society in disaster-hit Fukushima Prefecture.

The New Energy and Industrial Technology Development Organization (NEDO) announced its plan on Aug. 1, following the opening of the prefecture's first hydrogen station on the site of the Koriyama city government office in June.

Although hydrogen is drawing increasing attention as a new type of energy to replace fossil fuels, hurdles remain, particularly over costs, for its widespread use.

But still, the green energy business is expected to help the prefecture recover from the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami as well as the subsequent nuclear crisis.

NEDO's planned plant is a core project intended to promote use of the gas and nurture relevant industries to establish a futuristic hydrogen society in Fukushima Prefecture. The plant will produce hydrogen using renewable energy, such solar and wind power.

One disadvantage of renewable energy is the difficulty in ensuring a stable electricity supply. The planned factory will attempt to get around this problem by converting electricity generated from renewable energy into hydrogen because the gas is easier to store and transport.

After Tohoku Electric Power Co. dropped its plan to build a nuclear plant in Namie, the construction site and the surrounding area were selected for the hydrogen factory.

Part of the site will be provided free of charge to the Namie municipal government.

While 4.5 hectares of the land will host the hydrogen plant, the remaining 35 hectares will be used to set up solar panels.

Hydrogen produced at the facility will be used primarily to supply power to fuel-cell vehicles, which run on motors operated by electricity generated by combining hydrogen and oxygen.

The facility will have a total capacity of 10 megawatts, enough to supply hydrogen to 10,000 fuel-cell vehicles.

Fuel-cell cars emit only water while in operation, and their energy efficiency is higher than that of gas-powered and other types of vehicles.

Toshiba Corp., Tohoku Electric and Iwatani Corp. were chosen in autumn last year as operators of the hydrogen facility. Its construction will start next summer, and experimental operations are expected to begin by 2020

HYDROGEN FOR FUEL-CELL VEHICLES

The Koriyama city government has introduced a fuel-cell vehicle for official use. The first hydrogen station for fuel-cell vehicles in Fukushima Prefecture opened in the parking lot of the city government office in June.

According to the city and other sources, the station in Koriyama was the third in northeastern Tohoku region, after two stations in Sendai.

Another hydrogen station will be installed in Minami-Soma, Fukushima Prefecture. And a movable station is planned to provide hydrogen in the cities of Fukushima and Koriyama.

However, the use of fuel-cell vehicles has not spread sufficiently.

Although a central government subsidy is available, fuel-cell vehicles cost more than 7 million yen (\$63,700) each, and there are few hydrogen stations.

According to Koriyama city, Japan had 1,500 registered fuel-cell vehicles as of the end of last year. The city government's fuel-cell vehicle, in fact, was the first one to operate in Fukushima Prefecture.

Starting this fiscal year, the prefectural government started offering a subsidy to set up hydrogen stations.

It also plans to begin a subsidy program targeting those who want to buy fuel-cell vehicles by the end of August at the earliest to contribute to realizing a hydrogen society.

Contaminated vehicles stored in Fukushima

September 1, 2017

190 vehicles left Fukushima plant with high levels of radiation

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201709010005.html>

By TERU OKUMURA/ Staff Writer

Nearly 200 unchecked vehicles that left the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant in the days after the disaster struck had radiation levels exceeding the government safety standard, a survey showed.

Two vehicles that were not tested for contamination before they were driven from the plant remain unaccounted for, and their radiation levels are unknown.

Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the crippled plant, began looking for the contaminated vehicles and measuring their radiation levels in 2012 at the government's request.

According to the survey, 600 cars used by workers and 1,100 vehicles for business purposes were parked on the site of the nuclear plant when the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami struck on March 11, 2011.

Of them, 460 vehicles were driven from the plant site by March 22.

"Inspections and decontamination work for the cars started on March 23," a TEPCO official said. "Until then, we were too busy dealing with the accident to check the vehicles for radiation before they left."

The readings for 190 vehicles exceeded the government safety standard of 13,000 counts per minute (cpm). At least one vehicle recorded more than 100,000 cpm, according to TEPCO.

Some of them had been sold to used car dealerships, according to the survey.

The contaminated vehicles are being stored at a TEPCO facility in the no-entry zone near the plant.

"We will continue the survey," a TEPCO official said.

Living and working in Fukushima



A worker engaged in disaster recovery is pictured in Naraha, Fukushima Prefecture, on Aug. 29, 2017. The worker noted a variety of professions his fellow recovery workers had been engaged in the past, such as cooking and caregiving. (Mainichi)

September 5, 2017

Pains, gains accompany Fukushima disaster recovery work

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170905/p2a/00m/0na/026000c>

FUKUSHIMA -- Nearly six and a half years since the outbreak of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster, numerous people from across the country are engaged in disaster recovery work in Fukushima Prefecture, including 5,000-plus workers a day engaged in reactor decommissioning at the plant and others joining decontamination work in the region. Despite a lack of deep exchanges with local communities, the workers take pride in their jobs that contribute to regional reconstruction.

A former farmer in his 50s hailing from southern Fukushima Prefecture has been engaged in reactor decommissioning and decontamination of houses tainted with radioactive materials emanating from the nuclear disaster over the past four years. **He found the job through a public job placement office after abandoning his apple orchard due to harmful rumors in the wake of the nuclear disaster.**

"The succulent apples that I used to grow were very popular," he said, reminiscing about his farming days during an interview with the Mainichi Shimbun at a park near National Route No. 6, whose traffic is busy with vehicles involved in disaster recovery work. He used to be a part-time farmer while working for an automobile company, but he switched to full-time farming after being reassured of the popularity of his apples with a high sugar content, as they had earned a good reputation among consumers even from as far away as Tokyo.

The nuclear disaster broke out at a time when he was adding more apple trees to his orchard. Telephone orders for apples slowed after fears of possible radiation contamination spread among consumers. He was overwhelmed by snowballing debts, becoming even unable to cover fertilizer expenses. He had no choice but to leave farming.

Currently, he clears land at a construction site for an interim storage facility straddling over the Fukushima Prefecture towns of Okuma and Futaba for radiation-tainted soil generated from decontamination work in the prefecture.

As disaster recovery work often takes place in areas with high radiation doses, workers' daily wages are almost 10,000 yen higher than those of general construction workers, according to him. When it comes to work on the premises of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, the monthly wage sometimes even tops 500,000 yen.

In the meantime, he sometimes feels a sense of anxiety among residents toward the soaring number of disaster recovery workers in the area as they are complete strangers to locals. This appears to be partly because some workers have been arrested over criminal cases such as theft and assault. Although he had wished he could resume farming once disaster recovery progresses, his hopes were gradually dashed amid prolonged reconstruction work.

Having his own family to support, he has little choice but to stay with his current job. "We must help fellow prefectural residents because they are having a difficult time," he once told himself, but he sometimes feels helpless whenever he sees houses that he and his fellow workers thoroughly cleaned remaining unoccupied. "What are we doing this for?" he wonders every now and then.

A man in his early 30s originally from Tochigi Prefecture has been involved in demolition work for houses that were vacated by residents due to evacuation orders and have become dilapidated. Once a system engineer upon graduation from university, he subsequently changed jobs a couple of times during his six years living in Tokyo after simply getting tired of daylong computer work. He ended up returning to his parents' home in Tochigi and found a part-time job.

One day, he was driving along the Fukushima coastlines for the first time and was devastated to see houses that were barricaded as they were within the so-called "difficult-to-return" zones plagued by high radiation levels.

"I want to participate in historic work to rebuild Fukushima," he thought to himself. He wasted no time to search for a job on the internet and soon found himself clad in a work suit, doing heavy physical work under the scorching sun -- his first such experience.

"What you do is something we cannot carry out on our own. Thank you," an elderly disaster victim once told him. He was thrilled, realizing he was somehow being of help to the area. "I'm so happy," he said.

6 and a half years later in Fukushima



September 11, 2017

Japan marks 6 and half years since 3/11 disaster

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20170911_02/

Monday marks 6 and a half years since a major earthquake and tsunami struck northeastern Japan on March 11th, 2011.

The National Police Agency confirmed that the disaster has left 18,440 people dead or missing. The Reconstruction Agency says more than 3,500 others died in shelters or from disaster-related causes.

Data provided by authorities of 3 hardest-hit prefectures show that over 20,000 people are still living in temporary housing. Iwate has 8,142 such evacuees; Miyagi 7,148; Fukushima 6,210.

The total number declined about 30 percent from the figure as of the end of March this year.

NHK learned that 828 households in temporary housing were urged to move elsewhere due to a fall in tenant numbers.

The figure could grow as an increasing number of landowners are asking for the return of land used for temporary homes amid progress in reconstruction efforts.

Some evacuees from more than 20 municipalities in the 3 prefectures will likely have to continue living in temporary housing next year and beyond.

This is partly because residential land development on high ground is still underway to allow such evacuees to live in communities. Evacuation orders are also still in place in some areas due to the nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant.

Residents' associations in temporary housing communities are disbanding because of decreasing numbers of tenants. Evacuees urged to move to other temporary housing are under great stress.

Life in Fukushima feels "hopeless" for many

September 11, 2017

Rent hike looms for 70% of 3/11 disaster victims in state-run housing

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/09/11/national/2018-rent-hike-looms-70-2011-quake-victims-living-state-run-housing/#.WbZ0LcZpyos>

Kyodo

MORIOKA, IWATE PREF. – About 70 percent of those forced into government-run housing because of the Great East Japan Earthquake will face rent hikes in fiscal 2018 as the government moves to reduce financial support for those with low incomes.

The rent hikes are expected to affect some 16,000 households in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures. The municipal governments responsible for the state-run dwellings are demanding a review of the central government's plan.

Monday marked 6½ years since the magnitude 9.0 quake spawned tsunami that wiped out parts of Tohoku's coastline on the afternoon of March 11, 2011.

Under the government's rent subsidy plan, the aid declines gradually starting from the sixth year in state-run housing and ceases altogether in the 11th year, though the amount of support varies depending on each person's rent and income.

However, under special measures, people whose houses were destroyed are eligible for three years of public housing regardless of income. Many began moving into such housing in fiscal 2013.

For example, a disaster victim in Sendai whose only source of income is the state pension and who lives in a state-run dwelling with two rooms and a kitchen will pay ¥5,600 in rent every month until the fifth year. After the 11th year, when the financial support is withdrawn, the rent will be ¥18,200.

Beneficiaries of such dwellings include households whose monthly income is ¥80,000 or less, from which a certain amount is deducted for dependents residing there. According to the municipal governments, the number of such households totaled 3,321 in Iwate, 9,272 in Miyagi and 4,101 in Fukushima.

Some of them receive financial support from their municipalities and therefore will not be affected by the reduction in central government support.

One such person is Toshiji Sato, who lives alone in a state-run housing unit in Sendai.

Sato was a taxi driver but quit the industry after developing mental distress from the disasters. He now relies solely on his pension.

He stopped smoking and drinking in a bid to save money but now, after paying rent, medical and utility costs, has almost no money left over, he said.

In May, Sato and other displaced residents living in public housing launched a campaign calling for the suspension of the rent hike. About 2,000 signatures were collected.

"I want the country and the city to take a little more care of the disaster victims," he said.

September 11, 2017

Survey: Jobless rate still triple pre-2011 level in Fukushima area

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201709110027.html>

By OSAMU UCHIYAMA/ Staff Writer

FUKUSHIMA--Almost a third of working-age residents in the vicinity of the embattled Fukushima nuclear plant are jobless and surviving on compensation or pensions six and a half years after the disaster, a survey has found.

The survey, by Fukushima University's Fukushima Future Center for Regional Revitalization, found the unemployment rate is 31.9 percent among those ages 15-64 in seven of the eight municipalities in Futaba county, which surrounds the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, including host towns Okuma and Futaba.

The jobless rate is three times that of the pre-disaster level. The ratio of regular employees was found to be 41.3 percent, down from 61.8 percent before the disaster.

Fuminori Tanba, associate professor of social welfare and rebuilding at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, who led the survey team, underlined the importance of local government assistance in helping the victims find work.

"The victims' self-help or the payouts of compensation alone are not sufficient in empowering them to rebuild their lives," Tanba said. "Administrative support aimed at helping them find jobs will be needed." The recent survey, released on Sept. 6, was a follow-up to the first of its kind, conducted in autumn 2011. Most of the residents in the county were forced to evacuate when the nuclear crisis unfolded in March that year.

The center sent the questionnaire by mail to the 26,582 households in the seven municipalities between February and March, with an eighth, the town of Hirono, opting not to participate.

The center received responses from 37.9 percent of survey recipients.

Asked how they make ends meet, compensation for the nuclear accident was cited the most frequently, by 56.4 percent of respondents, followed by national pensions, totaling 50.7 percent. Only 32.7 percent said their main source of income was work. Respondents were allowed to choose more than one answer to the question.

The results suggested that the victims had to rely on compensation, national pensions or savings to get by, as they faced difficulties in resuming farming and other businesses they formerly were engaged in before the Fukushima disaster.

According to the survey, only 16.1 percent are either "hopeful" or "greatly hopeful" about their future, while 50.4 percent feel either "hopeless" or "completely hopeless."

Aging rate worrying in Fukushima

September 9, 2017

49% of Fukushima nuke disaster evacuees returning home to live are elderly: survey

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170909/p2a/00m/0na/004000c>

Nearly half of people currently living in nuclear disaster-hit areas in Fukushima Prefecture where evacuation orders have been lifted are aged 65 or over, a survey conducted by the Mainichi Shimbun has found.

The population aging rate -- the ratio of people in this age group to the population -- in these areas is nearly twice the figure before the outbreak of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant disaster in March 2011, as many younger evacuees have not come back to their hometowns for fear of being exposed to radiation or have settled down in areas where they took shelter.

The regional communities in these areas could be endangered because their current population is less than 10 percent of the pre-disaster figure and households in these areas consist of smaller member numbers.

The Mainichi Shimbun surveyed nine cities, towns and villages in Fukushima Prefecture about the situations of areas where evacuation orders had been lifted by this past spring

As of July and August, 5,951 people in 2,970 households have returned to or newly moved into these areas. Of these people, 2,929, or 49.2 percent, are aged at least 65.

According to a national census conducted in 2010 -- before the March 2011 disaster -- the rate was 27.4 percent in all areas of these nine municipalities.

The latest figure is above the anticipated population aging rate in Japan for 2065, which the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research put at 38.4 percent.

Of all the nine municipalities, the population aging rate in the village of Kawauchi is the highest at 71.3 percent. The town of Naraha has the lowest figure, but it still stands at 37 percent.

The figures in Kawauchi and two other municipalities among these nine are higher than the 60.5 percent in the village of Nanmoku, Gunma Prefecture, which had the highest population aging rate of all municipalities in Japan in the 2015 census.

The number of people who currently live in the areas where evacuation orders have been lifted is less than 10 percent the number of people registered as residents just before the disaster, which was slightly above 60,000.

Members of a growing number of households in these areas are living separately. The average number of members per household is two, almost equal to the figure in Tokyo at 2.02 in the 2015 census, which is the smallest number among all 47 prefectures. In the 2010 pre-disaster census, the average figure in the nine municipalities had been 3.04.

An official of the city of Minamisoma, one of the nine municipalities, expressed concerns about the aging of its population. "There'll be a growing number of cases where people living by themselves die alone and where an elderly family member has to look after another elderly member," the official said.

In Minamisoma, only a limited number of medical institutions and nursing care facilities have reopened. "There's a serious workforce shortage," the official lamented.

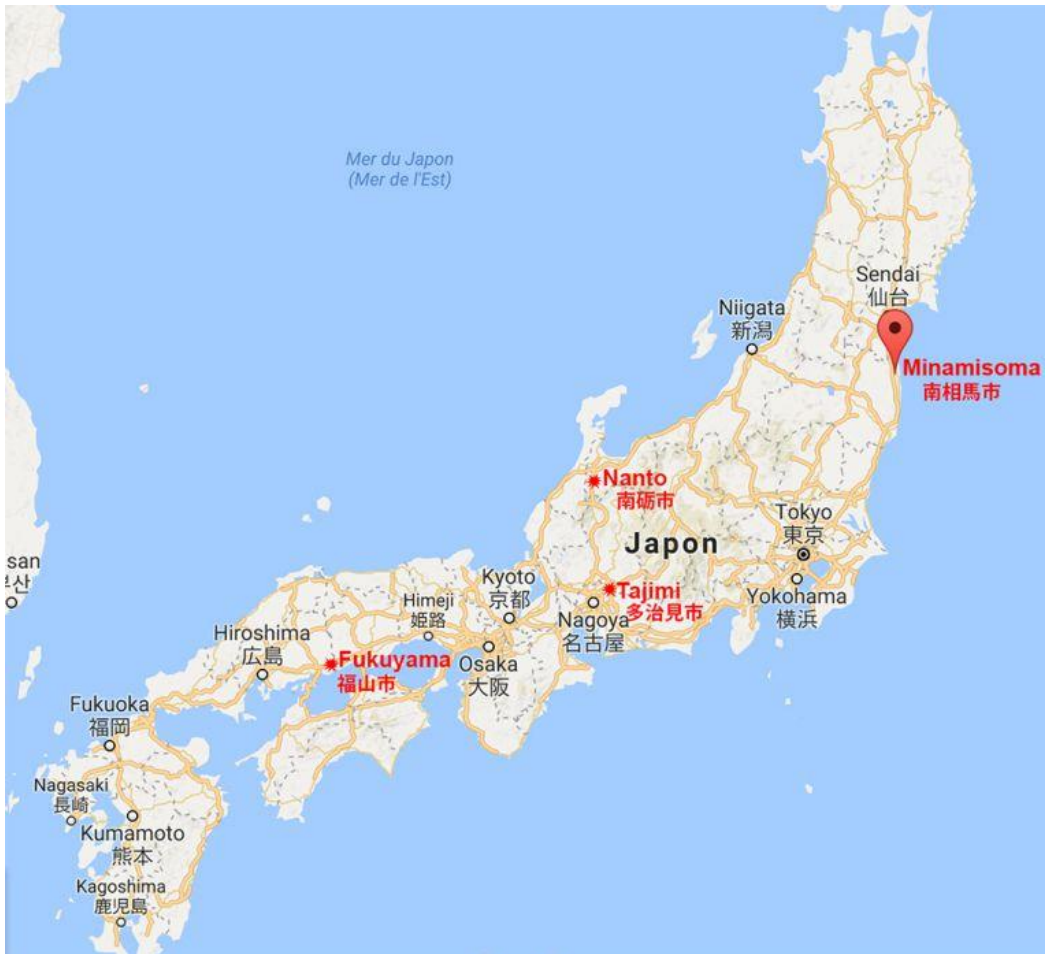
Only about five of 94 members of volunteer firefighters in the village of Katsurao have returned home since the evacuation order was lifted.

An official of the Katsurao Municipal Government voiced fears about the shortage of volunteer firefighters. "We are worried that it will be difficult to mobilize these volunteers if a fire breaks out in the village. As long as there are not enough young people, it'll be difficult to maintain the fire brigade in the village," the official said.

Ritsumeikan University associate professor Fuminori Tanba, who was involved in the compilation of restoration plans in municipalities where evacuation orders were issued, noted, "The situation of areas affected by the nuclear crisis heralds the future situation of Japan where the birthrate is declining and the

population is aging. Local governments need to join hands across broad areas in addressing challenges that cannot be tackled by a single municipality, such as nursing care and disaster management," he said.

Fukushima 311voices : Do they really expect us to believe this?



Dossier 3

September 11, 2017

New study says Minami-soma as safe as Western Japan cities – do they really expect us to believe this?

<https://fukushima311voices.wordpress.com/2017/09/06/new-study-says-minami-soma-as-safe-as-western-japan-cities-do-they-really-expect-us-to-believe-this/>

新しい調査によると、南相馬市は西日本の都市と同じくらい安全だそうです。こんな調査結果が信じられるでしょうか？

On September 5, 2017, Minami-soma city made a statement on the city's radiation levels compared to 3 cities in West Japan, which has been reported in several newspapers. It's important to comment on this study because the statement is intended to persuade the population to return to live there.

We are publishing comments on the articles below after having discussed with M. Ozawa of the citizen's measurement group named the "Fukuichi Area Environmental Radiation Monitoring Project". For English speaking readers, please refer to the article of Asahi Shimbun in English. For our arguments we refer to other articles published in other newspapers – Fukushima Minyu and Fukushima Minpo – which are only in Japanese.

2017年9月5日、南相馬市は同市と西日本の3市の外部被曝ばく線量を測定し、その結果について発表しました。いくつかの新聞が報道しています。この発表は住民帰還を促す意図を持っているので、コメントすることが重要かと思われま

す。ふくいち周辺環境放射線モニタリングプロジェクトの小澤洋一さんにお話をお聞きし、以下のコメントを投稿いたします。以下に引用するのは朝日新聞の記事ですが、これは英語と日本語と両方で報道されているためです。朝日新聞には記載されていないことが福島民友と福島民報に報道されていますので、そちらも適宜引用させていただきます。

Here are the locations of Minami-soma and the 3 other cities.

南相馬市と記事に登場する3市の位置については下記の地図をご覧ください。

see above

Here is the article of the Asahi Shimbun:

Fukushima city shows radiation level is same as in west Japan

By SHINTARO EGAWA/ Staff Writer

September 5, 2017 at 18:10 JST

MINAMI-SOMA, Fukushima Prefecture–Radiation readings here on the Pacific coast north of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant are almost identical to those of sample cities on the other side of Japan.

The Minami-Soma government initiated the survey and hopes the results of the dosimeter readings, released Sept. 4, will encourage more evacuees to return to their home areas after they fled in the aftermath of the 2011 nuclear disaster.

A total of 100 portable dosimeters were handed out to 25 city employees from each of four cities–Minami-Soma, Tajimi in Gifu Prefecture, Fukuyama in Hiroshima Prefecture and Nanto in Toyama Prefecture. They were asked to take them wherever they went from May 29 through June 11.

The staff members were evenly dispersed with their homes in all corners of the cities they represented. In addition, only those living in wooden houses were selected as different materials, concrete walls, for example, are more effective in blocking radiation.

In July 2016, evacuation orders for most parts of Minami-Soma were lifted, but not many residents have so far returned.

The city's committee for health measures against radiation, which is made up of medical experts, analyzed the data.

The median value of the external radiation dosage of the 25 staff of Minami-Soma was 0.80 millisieverts per annum, while the average value was 0.82 mSv per annum, according to Masaharu Tsubokura, the head of the committee and a physician at Minami-Soma general hospital.

No significant difference was found in the three western cities.

Both figures were adjusted to include the natural radiation dose, and are below the 1-mSv per annum mark set by the national government as the acceptable amount of long-term additional radiation dosage, which is apart from natural radiation and medical radiation dosages.

The radiation doses in all cities were at levels that would not cause any health problems, according to Tsubokura.

“Making comparisons with other municipalities is important,” Tsubokura said. “I am intending to leave the survey results as an academic paper.”

こちらが朝日新聞の記事です。

南相馬市での外部被曝線量、県外と「ほとんど差ない」

江川慎太郎

2017年9月5日 13時00分

福島県南相馬市は4日、5月末から2週間、市と交流のある岐阜県多治見市など3市と協力し、それぞれの市職員に小型の線量計を持たせ、外部被曝（ひばく）線量を測定したところ、南相馬市と3市の間で、測定結果に大きな差はなかったと発表した。

南相馬市では、昨年7月に小高区などで避難指示が解除されたが、住民帰還は思うように進んでいない。調査は、市民に客観的なデータを示すことを目的に市が実施し、専門家による市放射線健康対策委員会が分析などを担当した。

ほかに測定に参加したのは、広島県福山市と富山県南砺市。5月29日から6月11日まで、各市職員25人ずつ計100人に小型軽量積算線量計を着用させ、測定してもらった。

測定地区の偏りをなくするため職員の自宅が市内一面均等になるようにし、住宅の構造は木造に統一するように選定したという。

市放射線健康対策委員会委員の坪倉正治・市立総合病院医師によると、南相馬市の外部被曝線量の年換算値は25人の中央値で0・80ミリシーベルト。平均値も0・82ミリシーベルトで、他の3市と大きな差はなかったという。値はいずれも自然界の放射線量を加味したものだ。

国が追加被曝線量の長期目標として示している年間1ミリシーベルトを下回っており、どの市も健康影響を考えるレベルにはないという。

坪倉医師は「ほかの自治体との比較は重要だ。今回の測定結果は論文化して残したい」と話し、学会誌などで発表していく考えだ。

Our comments

こちらがコメントです。

1) The difference of life style between city employees and local agricultural population

As we see in the article, portable dosimeters were handed out to city employees. They spend most of their day time in an office protected by concrete walls which are efficient for blocking radiation as stated in the article. However, in Minami-soma, most of the population spends more time outside, very often working in the fields. Their life style is different and therefore the external radiation dose cannot be similar to those of city employees. The result of the comparison between the external radiation dose of city employees cannot be used as an argument to say that it is safe for the local population to live in Minami-soma.

市の職員と農業を主たる生業とする多くの南相馬市の住民との生活様式の違い

記事に書かれているように、市職員に小型の線量計を持たせ、外部被曝（ひばく）線量を測定しています。市職員は日中、ほとんどコンクリートの壁に囲まれた建物の中のオフィスで過ごしています。

そして、英文記事には書かれていますが、コンクリートは遮蔽効果が高いのです。しかし南相馬市では、住民の多くの方々は屋外で過ごされますし、農作業をなさることが多いのです。皆さんの生活様式は市職員のそれとは異なっていますから、当然外部被曝線量も同様ではないはずですが。報道された外部被曝線量の比較の結果をもって、南相馬市に住むのは安全、ということとはできません。

2) In the article of Fukushima Minyu, it is stated that in Minami-soma the radiation dose has a wider range than in the other three cities. This means that there are hotspots, which leads to higher risks of internal irradiation.

福島民友の記事には「他県3市に比べ南相馬市は外部被ばく線量のばらつきが大きかった。」とあります。これは南相馬市には内部被ばくのリスクにつながるホットスポットが存在する可能性を示唆します。

3) The radiation dose expressed in terms of Sieverts is relevant for radioprotection when the source of radiation is fixed and identified. This is the case for most of the nuclear workers. However, in the case of Fukushima after the nuclear accident where the whole environment is radio-contaminated and the radioactive substances are dispersed widely everywhere, it is not a relevant reference for radioprotection. It is important in this case to measure surface contamination density, especially of soil.

シーベルトの単位で表される外部被曝線量は放射線源がわかっている、固定されている場合の放射線防護に有効です。例えば放射線を扱う作業者の防護の場合などです。しかし、福島県のように、原発事故以来、環境が放射能汚染され、放射性物質が拡散しているスペースでは、放射線防護に有効ではありません。この場合は表面汚染密度、特に土壌を測定することが重要です。

4) 6 years and 6 months since the accident, cesium has sunk in the soil. It is thought to be between 6 and 10 cm from the surface. This means the top layer of soil from 0 to 5 cm is blocking the radiation, reducing the measures of the effective dose. However, this does not mean that the population is protected from internal irradiation, since cesium can be re-scattered by many means, by digging or by flooding, for example.

事故以来6年半経った今、セシウムは土壌に沈着していています。現在は地表から6センチから10センチくらいの深さにあるものと思われます。これは、0から5センチの土壌の層が放射線を遮蔽していることを意味します。しかし、だからといって、住民が内部被曝から守られていることにはなりません。というのは例えば掘り返えされたり、洪水にあたりなど、色々な原因でセシウムが再拡散することが考えられるからです。

5) The reliability of individual portable dosimeters has already been raised many times. This device is not adequate to capture the full 360° exposure in radio-contaminated environments as described in point 3 above.

小型の線量計の信頼性はこれまでも何度も指摘されて来ています。このツールは3)で記述されたような環境全体が汚染されているような場合の360度方向からの外部被曝線量の測定には適していません。

6) In the article, it is stated that background radiation is included in the compared values, but it does not mention the actual background radiation measurements in the 4 cities.

報道によると、比較された4市の値には自然放射線量を加味してあるとあります。しかし、各市の自然放射線量の値については記述がありません。

The Table of Fukushima Minyu

Radiation dose of the 4 cities

Median values

Sum of the dose (microsievert)

Minami-soma

31.44	Tajimi in Gifu prefecture
27.55	Fukuyama in Hiroshima prefecture
30.41	Nanto in Toyama prefecture
30.91	0.81

Values include the background radiation dose

福島民報

To summarize, the sample study group does not represent the overall population. The study doesn't include the risks of internal radiation, for which the measurement of contaminated soil is indispensable. The dosimeters are not adequate to measure the full load of radio-contaminated environments. So, the research method is not adequate to draw the conclusion to say that it is safe for the population to return to live in Minami-soma.

要約すると、サンプルグループが全体の人口の代表していないこと、調査が内部被ばくのリスクを考慮していないこと（内部被ばくのリスクのアセスメントには土壌汚染測定が必須）、小型線量計は放射能汚染された環境の全体的な測定には不適合であることなどが挙げられます。結論として、南相馬に帰還しても安全という結論を導くには、この調査方法はとても適切とは言えません。

European parliament not happy about easing restrictions on Fukushima foods

September 14, 2017

EU parliament opposes bid to reduce testing of Fukushima food imports

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/09/14/national/politics-diplomacy/eu-parliament-opposes-bid-reduce-testing-fukushima-food-imports/#.WbqR7MZpGos>

AFP-JJI

STRASBOURG, FRANCE – The European Parliament on Wednesday warned against easing health controls imposed on food products imported from the Fukushima region in the wake of the nuclear meltdowns of 2011.

The checks were imposed on food from the area around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, which went into meltdown after being hit by massive tsunami, spewing radiation over a wide area in the world's most serious nuclear disaster since Chernobyl in 1986.

The European Commission, the EU's executive arm, wants to reduce the list of foods subject to radiation tests before they can be imported into the bloc, which currently includes rice, mushrooms, fish and other seafood.

A resolution passed by a large majority of MEPs called on the commission to withdraw its proposal, saying it was "very difficult to verify whether the measures proposed are sufficient" to protect European consumers and there was reason to think it "could lead to an increase in exposure to radioactive contaminated food.

French Green MEP Michele Rivasi said extra vigilance was needed as the EU negotiates a trade deal with Japan.

MEPs criticized the Commission for not providing them with the data used to decide it was acceptable to relax the restrictions.

The matter will be reviewed in the coming weeks by experts appointed by EU member states, ahead of a vote expected in October, a parliament spokesman told AFP.

First rebuilding hub



Bags of contaminated soil are stored near JR Futaba Station in Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture. The area has become part of the government-designated rebuilding hub. (Asahi Shimbun file photo)

September 15, 2017

First 'hub' set up in Fukushima no-entry zone to speed rebuilding

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201709150058.html>

By NORIYOSHI OTSUKI/ Senior Staff Writer

An area in the no-entry zone of Futaba, a town that co-hosts the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, became the first government-designated "rebuilding hub" after the 3/11 disaster.

The designation on Sept. 15 means decontamination will speed up and infrastructure restored so the evacuation order in the town center can be lifted by spring 2022.

Most of Futaba is currently located in a difficult-to-return zone because of high radiation levels.

Rebuilding efforts have not started there yet, even six-and-a-half years since the nuclear accident unfolded.

The rebuilding hub covers about 560 hectares of land around Futaba Station, accounting for about 10 percent of the town's total area. It is almost the same size as an interim storage facility for contaminated soil and other waste that will be built within the town.

The central government will start full-scale decontamination efforts in the hub zone, and plans to initially lift the evacuation order for the area around the station by the end of fiscal 2019 to allow an open thoroughfare and short stays by members of the public.

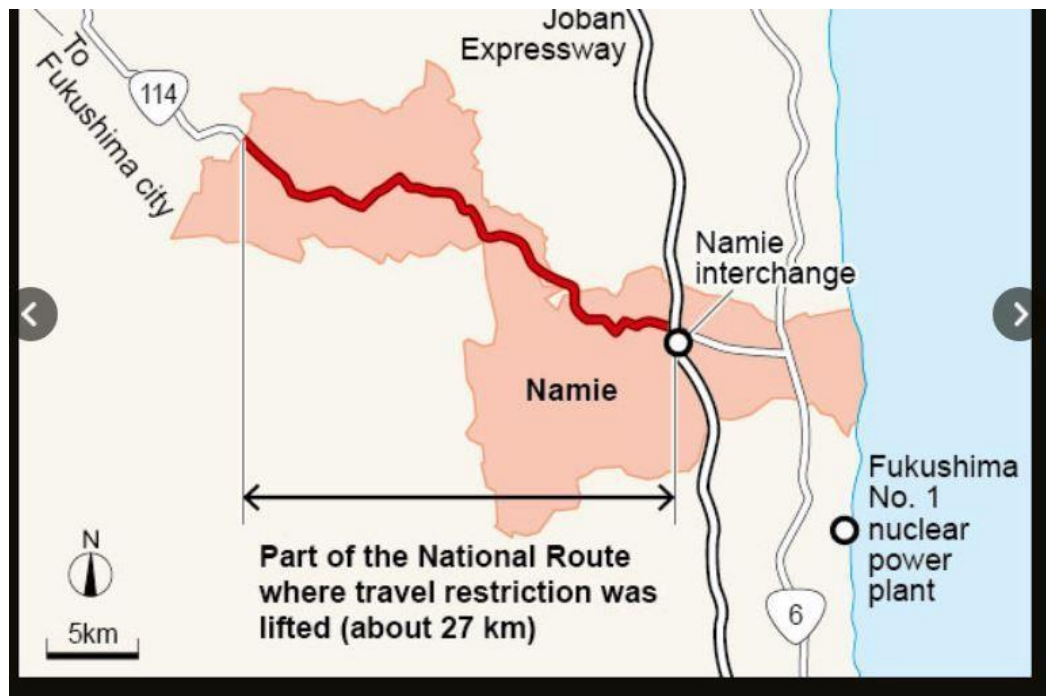
By spring 2022, the government plans to lift the evacuation order for the entire hub zone. It hopes to bring back 1,400 former residents to the zone by 2027, and also provide homes for about 600 people from outside the town, such as workers at the Fukushima plant.

In the difficult-to-return zone, radiation readings surpassed 50 millisieverts per annum right after the triple meltdown occurred at the plant in 2011. An evacuation order was issued to about 25,000 people in seven municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture, covering 33,700 hectares in total.

The difficult-to-return zones have been excluded from the government's rebuilding efforts. But a related law was amended in May, and the government is now responsible for rebuilding areas that could be made habitable in the near future after decontamination, meaning a radiation reading of 20 millisieverts per year or less.

In late August, Futaba applied to the government to host a designated rebuilding hub. Other municipalities with difficult-to-return zones are now preparing applications for the program.

Travel ban on Road 114 lifted: "Much more convenient"



September 20, 2017

Travel ban lifted on route leading to town near Fukushima plant

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201709200053.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

NAMIE, Fukushima Prefecture--Motorists lined up early in the morning on Sept. 20 in front of a barrier on National Route 114 here, anticipating an event they had waited nearly six-and-a-half years to see.

And then it happened at 6 a.m. The barrier was removed, and a 27-kilometer section was finally reopened to the public, giving evacuated residents direct access to the eastern part of Namie, a town that lies just north of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Hisashi Suzuki, an 85-year-old Namie resident who now lives in Nihonmatsu, an inland city in Fukushima Prefecture, used the section to check on his home and family grave.

“Until now, we had to arrange for a thoroughfare pass beforehand, and we sometimes had to wait at checkpoints,” Suzuki said. “This is much more convenient.”

National Route 114, one of main arteries that connects the center of the prefecture with the Pacific coast, runs through much of Namie.

The 27-km section is still within the “difficult-to-return” zone because of high radiation levels, meaning the evacuees can visit their homes in the zone but not return on a permanent basis.

Houses along the road in the no-go zone are now covered in weeds and tangled in vines.

Access to the road section is limited to automobiles. Bicycles, motorcycles and pedestrians are not allowed to enter.

But with the road now reopened, municipalities in the area are hoping for an increasing flow in people, including evacuees visiting their homes and workers involved in reconstruction projects.

All 21,000 or so residents of Namie were ordered to evacuate the town after the nuclear disaster unfolded in March 2011. Many of those living on the coast fled west on National Route 114.

The route was closed in April 2011 because it lies within a 20-km radius of the nuclear plant.

Residents seeking to visit eastern Namie needed to obtain permission from the town government or had to take a cumbersome detour.

The evacuation order was lifted in March this year for the eastern part of the town, which was less contaminated because of the wind direction at the time of the triple meltdown at the plant.

Much of the mountainous western part of Namie is still designated as a difficult-to-return zone.

After receiving requests from the public and municipalities, authorities conditionally lifted the travel ban on the road to allow for convenient access from central Fukushima to eastern Namie.

The central government has set up barriers at 88 intersections on Route 114 to prevent thieves and other unapproved people from using side roads.

In August, a survey showed the radiation dosage on the surface of Route 114 was a maximum 5.53 microsievarts per hour, more than 20 times higher than the threshold level of 0.23 microsievart per hour that many municipalities consider would require decontamination work.

(This article was written by Kenji Izawa and Osamu Uchiyama.)

Kids' sporting event held in Nahara

September 30, 2017

Kids' sporting event returns to Fukushima town

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20170930_14/

A childcare facility in a town near the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant has held its first sporting event since the 2011 accident.

The facility was able to reopen in April, after the evacuation order for the town of Naraha was lifted 2 years ago.

Some 50 children and their family members took part in the event on Saturday.

Parents cheered on their children and took photos. Elderly residents joined children in a beanbag-toss game.

One woman said she enjoyed playing sports with her 3-year-old daughter in her hometown.

Another woman in her 80s said she goes back and forth between Naraha and temporary housing outside the town. She said she is very happy to see her great-grandchildren.

Only a quarter of Naraha's former residents have returned since the evacuation order was lifted.

Frst rice harvest in 7 years

October 2, 2017

Rice harvest near damaged Fukushima plant

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20171002_19/

Farmers have harvested rice for the first time in 7 years in an area near the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

After the nuclear accident in 2011, residents in the district of Odaka in Minamisoma City, Fukushima Prefecture were ordered to evacuate.

The government lifted the evacuation order in July last year. Farmers resumed growing rice this year as safety was confirmed in experimental cultivation.

Rice cropping began on Monday using big combines in paddies with a total area of about 9 hectares.

A rice variety specially produced in Fukushima Prefecture was cultivated by an agricultural corporation established by local farming organizations.

According to the Tohoku Regional Agricultural Administration Office, this year's harvest is about average for Fukushima Prefecture.

The corporation will select the harvested rice based on its quality. **The rice will be shipped after it is put to radiation tests.**

The agriculture corporation president, Ryoichi Sato, said he is very happy with the first harvest in 7 years. He said the corporation will do its best to encourage more people to resume rice farming in the area.

NHK video

September 29, 2017

Preparing for Worst Case Scenario

<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/videos/20170929164808246/>

Could the Chiba ruling be a setback on the Maebashi ruling?

September 30, 2017

Damages for the nuclear disaster

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2017/09/30/editorials/damages-nuclear-disaster/#.WdEgCcZpGos>

Awarding damages to people who fled their homes following the March 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, the Chiba District Court ruled late last month that the plaintiffs are entitled to compensation for the loss of their hometowns in the catastrophe — the first ruling of its kind.

That should be good news for people who had to evacuate their hometowns in the nuclear fiasco. The Chiba court decision was only the second ruling to be handed down in a series of nearly 30 damages suits filed with 20 courts across the nation, involving more than 12,000 plaintiffs, against Tokyo Electric Power Holdings Co. and the government.

However, the ruling marked a setback from another decision handed down by the Maebashi District Court in March — in that it spared the national government of its responsibility for damages, saying it was not guilty of serious negligence.

The Chiba suit had been filed by 45 people who evacuated from Fukushima Prefecture to Ibaraki Prefecture, demanding a total of ¥2.8 billion in damages for their plight. The court awarded a combined ¥376 million to 42 people, including four who evacuated voluntarily. The court determined that damages paid for the plaintiffs' psychological suffering are not sufficient to cover the loss of the foundation of their lives, such as their hometown communities, which helped them establish and develop their individuality. It thus awarded compensation for the evacuees' loss of their hometowns — beyond the scope of damages being paid by Tepco to evacuees in general in accordance with government-set standards.

The focal point in the series of lawsuits is whether the government and Tepco were able to foresee the massive tsunami that hit the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant on March 11, 2011 — in the Great East Japan Earthquake — and caused core meltdowns in three of its reactors. The Chiba court determined that on the basis of long-term earthquake assessments released in 2002 by the government's quake research unit, the government and Tepco should have been able — by 2006 at the latest — to foresee that a large tsunami higher than the plant site, some 10 meters above sea level, would strike the plant.

What's hard to swallow is the court's subsequent logic. The ruling acknowledged that the government had the regulatory power to order Tepco to take action to prevent loss of the power supply to the reactors in case it was flooded by a tsunami, but said its failure to exercise that authority was not "extremely irrational" and did not constitute a violation of the law. Since the government and Tepco had only limited funding and human resources, it was impossible for them to take steps to cope with all the risks, the court said, adding that even if they had taken such measures, it may have been impossible to prevent the disaster given the size of the tsunami that actually hit the plant.

As for Tepco's responsibility, the court said that since the company was planning to take necessary measures on the basis of an experts' tsunami risk assessment, which was due out in 2012, Tepco cannot

be blamed for entirely ignoring the need for anti-tsunami action. The ruling thus concluded that Tepco did not commit such serious negligence as to require a significant increase in damages given to the plaintiffs. In its March ruling, the Maebashi District Court said the government's failure to exercise its regulatory power was irrational because it was clear that Tepco would not voluntarily take necessary steps — and determined that the government could have prevented the disaster. The Maebashi ruling said that Tepco, while it should have given priority to safety at the nuclear plant in weighing its anti-tsunami measures, instead put economic considerations first and thus deserves strong censure. It pointed out that the company could have easily prevented the catastrophe by moving emergency power sources to a higher location. **The Chiba court decision could mislead the government and power companies to think that they would be allowed to delay measures to ensure safety of nuclear power plants out of financial considerations.**

The plaintiffs in the Maebashi case have appealed the ruling on the grounds that the damages awarded — ¥38.55 million for 62 of the 137 plaintiffs — were too small. Those in the Chiba case are also expected to appeal to a higher court. The whole series of pending lawsuits will likely take a long time before they're concluded. The plaintiffs are commonly unhappy about the level of compensation provided under the government-set standards. The Chiba court ruling recognizes that the damages already provided do not fully cover the hardships of the evacuees. The government should not wait for court decisions on all the suits to consider reviewing its damages standard and expand support for the evacuees.

Lawsuit filed against TEPCO

Dossier 3

October 4, 2017

TEPCO sued over dialysis patient's death caused by nuclear disaster

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201710040036.html>

By RYOTA GOTO/ Staff Writer

The daughter of an 88-year-old man with kidney failure who died three weeks after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster due to disrupted access to dialysis treatment is suing Tokyo Electric Power Co. for 31 million yen (\$276,000).

In the first case of its kind, Emiko Endo, of Hirono, Fukushima Prefecture, argues that her father, Makoto Endo, died primarily because he could not receive sufficient dialysis treatment in the aftermath of the nuclear disaster.

The suit was filed at the Tokyo District Court on Oct. 3.

"Right before his death, my father appealed to me that he wanted to return home even by walking along the rail track and die at home," Endo, 69, said at a news conference held the same day.

Makoto, also a resident of Hirono, began receiving dialysis around 1998, according to the written complaint.

His routine had been to visit a hospital in Tomioka, a nearby town, three times a week to undergo dialysis. The triple meltdown at the TEPCO-operated Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant disrupted that schedule.

Makoto was evacuated to Tokyo a week after the crisis unfolded on March 11, 2011. He died April 1 at a Tokyo hospital after his condition deteriorated following several changes in the venue where he was receiving dialysis.

The Hirono town government has recognized his death as related to the nuclear disaster.

TEPCO would only accept that the nuclear accident was 50 percent responsible for Makoto's death and paid Endo about 7.8 million yen in compensation. The sum was determined in light of the criteria used to pay a holder of mandatory car insurance in the event of a fatal road accident.

Endo demanded more, but TEPCO refused. Their negotiations broke down late last year.

A lawyer representing the plaintiff said the lawsuit is the first to involve a dialysis patient whose death was recognized as being related to the nuclear disaster.

TEPCO said it will respond sincerely after studying the complaint and hearing Endo's argument.

October 3, 2017

Lawsuit filed over kidney disease patient's death blamed on nuclear accident

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/10/03/national/crime-legal/lawsuit-filed-kidney-disease-patients-death-blamed-nuclear-accident/#.WdSFIsZpGos>

JJI

The daughter of a man who died of kidney disease after the March 2011 meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant filed a lawsuit Tuesday seeking ¥31 million in damages from Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc.

The 69-year-old female plaintiff claims that the accident prevented her 88-year-old father, a resident of Hirono, Fukushima Prefecture, from getting proper treatment for his disease.

"My father would have lived longer without the accident," the daughter, Emiko Endo, told a news conference.

The father, Makoto, was forced to evacuate to Tokyo from his hospital in the Fukushima city of Iwaki so he could continue his dialysis treatments, according to her complaint filed with the Tokyo District Court.

He died in April 2011 after his health condition deteriorated.

Tepeco said it will respond to the matter sincerely.

Fukushima rice

October 9, 2017

Rice harvested near Fukushima accident site

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20171009_11/

A farmer in a town near the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant has harvested rice for the 1st time since the 2011 accident.

Noboru Watanabe harvested the crop from his paddy in the town of Tomioka on Monday, with local officials looking on.

Following the nuclear accident, the central government issued evacuation orders to all parts of the town. The orders were lifted for most areas in April.

Watanabe is taking part in a project to grow rice on a trial basis to confirm the safety of local produce.

He says he has removed topsoil from his paddy for decontamination and installed electric fences to keep wild boars and other animals away so that he could restart growing.

Watanabe says that although this is his 1st time in 7 years to harvest the paddy, he still remembers the satisfaction of growing a successful crop. He says he also wants to plant seedlings in his paddy next year and later.

Government and TEPCO ordered to pay damage to 3,800 plaintiffs



Lawyers hold banners saying "case won" on Oct. 10, 2017, after the Fukushima District Court recognized that the national government and Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) are responsible for compensation to those who lived in Fukushima Prefecture at the time of the nuclear disaster. (Mainichi)

October 10, 2017

Court orders compensation for Fukushima victims

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20171010_24/

The district court in Fukushima Prefecture has ordered the state and the operator of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant to pay damages for mental distress resulting from the 2011 nuclear accident.

The ruling comes in a class action suit filed by about 3,800 people. It is the 2nd case in which a court has acknowledged the government's liability for post-traumatic distress.

The plaintiffs brought the lawsuit in 2013. They include people who continued to live in their homes in the prefecture as well as those who evacuated from the area after the disaster.

Their suit stated that they suffered and continue to suffer mental distress after the accident destroyed the foundation of their livelihoods.

At issue was whether the government and operator Tokyo Electric Power Company could have foreseen the major tsunami on March 11, 2011, and prevented the damage. Whether TEPCO is paying appropriate compensation to evacuees, as well as the extent of its recipients, were also questioned.

On Tuesday, presiding judge Hideki Kanazawa ruled that the government and TEPCO are responsible for the accident.

More than 12,000 people across Japan have filed class action lawsuits over the accident with courts in 18 prefectures.

The suit in Fukushima Prefecture involves the largest number of plaintiffs. The Maebashi District Court in Gunma Prefecture, eastern Japan, handed down a similar ruling in March.

BREAKING NEWS: Government Ordered to Pay Fukushima Damages

<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/editors/3/20171010breaking/>

A Fukushima district court in northeastern Japan has ordered the government and the operator of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant to pay damages to about 3,800 plaintiffs affected by the 2011 nuclear accident.

Gov't, Tepco ordered to pay damages for Fukushima disaster

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20171010/p2g/00m/0dm/057000c>

FUKUSHIMA, Japan (Kyodo) -- A Japanese court on Tuesday ordered the state and the operator of the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant to pay damages over the March 2011 nuclear crisis, triggered by a deadly earthquake and tsunami disaster.

The Fukushima District Court ordered the government and Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc. to pay a total of 500 million yen (\$4.4 million) in the damages suit sought by around 3,800 plaintiffs, the most among around 30 similar suits filed in the wake of one of the world's worst nuclear accidents at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear complex.

The ruling by the Fukushima court is the third against Tepco, following decisions by the Maebashi District Court in March and the Chiba District Court last month. Of the three, only the Chiba court dismissed claims against the state.

While plaintiffs in the two previous cases were evacuees, over 80 percent of those in the Fukushima court case did not flee their homes after the accident.

In the ruling, the court concluded that the government was able to foresee a huge tsunami and avert a subsequent nuclear accident, while dismissing the claim by the plaintiffs that radiation levels around their residences should be restored to what they were before the crisis.

The plaintiffs claimed the government should be held liable because it was able to foresee the tsunami based on an assessment in 2002 and make Tepco take preventive measures.

The long-term earthquake assessment, made by the government's earthquake research promotion unit, predicted a 20 percent chance of a magnitude-8 level tsunami-triggering earthquake occurring along the Japan Trench in the Pacific Ocean within 30 years, including the area off Fukushima.

The government and Tepco, for their part, claimed the assessment was not established knowledge and that the tsunami could not have been foreseen. The government also argued that it only obtained powers to force Tepco to take anti-flooding measures after a legislative change following the disaster.

The plaintiffs also urged that radiation levels at their residences be restored to the levels before the accident. They sought monthly compensation of 50,000 yen until the radiation levels return to the pre-crisis level of 0.04 microsievert per hour.

The magnitude-9.0 earthquake and ensuing tsunami struck northeastern Japan on March 11, 2011, causing multiple meltdowns and hydrogen blasts at the nuclear power plant. Around 55,000 people remained evacuated both within and outside Fukushima Prefecture as of the end of August. Over 10,000 people have joined the roughly 30 suits filed at courts across the country.

Ruling on compensation includes voluntary evacuees



Lawyers hold a banner saying

[Related] Chiba court recognizes nuke disaster evacuees' loss of hometown for first time

October 11, 2017

Voluntary evacuees win compensation over Fukushima nuclear disaster

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20171011/p2a/00m/0na/014000c>

FUKUSHIMA -- The Oct. 10 ruling by a district court here, in which Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) and the Japanese government were ordered to pay plaintiffs in Fukushima and nearby prefectures a total of 500 million yen in damages from the 2011 nuclear disaster, **covered those who lived outside evacuation zones, signaling a shift in the compensation system.**

- **【Related】** Court orders gov't, Tepco to pay 500 mil. yen over Fukushima crisis
- **【Related】** Chiba court recognizes nuke disaster evacuees' 'loss of hometown' for first time
- **【Related】** Voluntary evacuees granted only small awards in Fukushima nuke disaster damage case

Roughly 3,800 plaintiffs brought a suit against the company and the state requesting a total of some 16 billion yen in damages, and of them, the Fukushima District Court ordered payments for some 2,900

people ranging from 10,000 to 360,000 yen per person. The court also recognized the responsibility of the national government in the nuclear disaster, ruling that it jointly pay half of the 500 million yen.

The majority of the plaintiffs in the case lived outside of the evacuation zones and voluntarily left the area following the disaster. Others lived outside of Fukushima Prefecture and were not eligible for receiving compensation from the accident. The decision recognized the right of voluntary evacuees and some in neighboring prefectures to compensation, expanding the scope of those eligible to receive payments.

"This opened up the possibility for anyone to be able to claim damages and receive relief," the legal group representing the plaintiffs in the case commented.

The number of residents who lived in the same areas as the victorious plaintiffs in Fukushima Prefecture alone exceeded 1.5 million. While the odds of the case being appealed are high, if the court maintains its ruling, it will have an enormous impact on the current compensation system.

Concerning the government's involvement in the accident, the court decision cited a 2002 long-term assessment concluded by the government's Headquarters for Earthquake Research Promotion, which predicted that a tsunami caused by a magnitude-8 or higher earthquake was possible along the coast of Fukushima Prefecture. The court pointed out that based on this assessment, the government could have predicted that a 15.7-meter tsunami could hit the power plant just as TEPCO estimated later in 2008, and stated that the government's inaction to order the utility to prepare tsunami countermeasures by the end of 2002 was "significantly lacking in rationality."

The standard for the amount of damages to be paid by TEPCO was decided in interim guidelines put in place by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation, and a broad distinction in compensation between those living in and nearby evacuation zones and those who chose to evacuate voluntarily was drawn by the end of 2011.

The amount to be paid to those living in the evacuation zones was set at a minimum of 8.5 million yen, but the amount awarded to voluntary evacuees was set at 80,000 yen in principle. Additionally, those living in the Aizu region of Fukushima Prefecture, Ibaraki Prefecture and other areas not directly nearby the reactors were completely excluded from receiving compensation, creating a disparity among evacuees from different regions and leading to numerous litigations.

Because of this, the plaintiffs in the Fukushima case claimed that they, including those living outside the evacuation zones, shared the same worries of having been exposed to radiation. Without claiming individual compensation, the group decided to file the suit for 50,000 yen per month until the radiation levels in the air where each person lived returned to the pre-disaster levels -- 0.04 microsieverts or lower in all cases -- regardless of the place of residence of the plaintiff.

Additionally, they divided the regions where the plaintiffs lived in such a way that a total of 35 representatives from each of the areas testified to damages. There are few precedents of this method, such as noise disturbance cases for those living near airports and military bases, but the group decided to adopt the method as it looks to have the state review the conventional compensation system itself.

The Oct. 10 court decision stated that the interim guidelines were merely a yardstick, and that the certification of compensation payments exceeding those guidelines should naturally be allowed, taking one important step forward in restructuring the system.

"Behind those 2,900 plaintiffs who won compensation are all of the victims (of the Fukushima disaster)," said lawyer Yoshio Nagumo, the head of the group's legal team. He hopes that this case will become an example to lead the reform of the compensation system. However, the amount actually awarded to each person was low.

"The ruling doesn't accurately reflect the damage suffered," said Jun Watanabe, another member of the legal team, hinting at the possibility of appealing the ruling. "We'll fight in order to raise the amount of appropriations even further."

Government's responsibility made clear

October 11, 2017

Evacuees hail ruling citing negligence in nuclear disaster

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201710110042.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Evacuees praised the Fukushima District Court's Oct. 10 ruling that harshly criticized the central government for negligence in not ordering Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) to take safeguards against tsunami, which led to the 2011 nuclear disaster.

"If we do not try to make the government's responsibility clear, a (similar) accident will be repeated. On that point, we obtained a complete victory (as the ruling acknowledged the government's responsibility)," said Takashi Nakajima, 61, leader of the plaintiffs.

The court ordered the government and TEPCO to pay compensation of 500 million yen (\$4.4 million) in total damages to 2,907 of the 3,824 plaintiffs.

It was the second court ruling to acknowledge the government's responsibility for failing to prevent the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, following the Maebashi District Court ruling in March.

The Chiba District Court in September, however, did not accept the plaintiffs' assertion that the government is responsible for the nuclear accident, which was caused by tsunami triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011.

In the Oct. 10 ruling handed down by the Fukushima District Court, presiding judge Hideki Kanazawa acknowledged that TEPCO and the government were both responsible for the nuclear accident.

However, the district court rejected the plaintiffs' demand that TEPCO and the government restore their living environments to pre-disaster levels.

The focus of the trial was the credibility of the "long-term appraisal" worked out by the government's Headquarters for Earthquake Research Promotion in July 2002. The appraisal pointed out the possibility that a major earthquake that would trigger a tsunami could occur off the coast of Fukushima Prefecture. As for the assessment, the government and TEPCO offered rebuttal, including the opposing views of experts.

The two defendants asserted that it was impossible to predict a major tsunami like the one that struck the nuclear plant. They also said that even if they took measures against tsunami, that would not have prevented the nuclear accident.

On the other hand, the Oct. 10 ruling placed importance on the long-term appraisal as an official viewpoint that was reached through experts' discussions. The ruling also said that even if other experts expressed opposing views, it cannot be argued that the credibility of the long-term appraisal had been lost.

The ruling said that if the government conducted simulations based on the long-term appraisal, it could have predicted a tsunami reaching a height of 15.7 meters, which was higher than the compound of the nuclear plant.

If the government had ordered TEPCO to take safeguards against tsunami of that scale by the end of 2002 based on the forecast, it could have prevented the nuclear accident, the ruling also said.

“The Fukushima District Court’s ruling acknowledged that if the government followed the long-term appraisal, it would have been able to prevent the situation in that all electric sources were lost (and, as a result, the nuclear accident occurred),” said Hitoshi Yoshioka, who served as a member of the government’s investigation committee on the nuclear accident. **“The ruling pointed out again that the government and TEPCO are bearing major responsibility for neglecting to take measures (to safeguard the nuclear plant against tsunami of that scale).”**

Enjoy the appeal of outdoors Fukushima

October 15, 2017

Fukushima takes camping to a whole new level of luxury with ‘glamping’

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/10/15/national/fukushima-takes-camping-whole-new-level-luxury-glamping/#.WeR4PztpGos>

Fukushima Minpo

“Glamping” — i.e., camping but with the comforts of modern amenities — has been growing in popularity in Fukushima Prefecture as more people look to bring a new level of luxury to the great outdoors.

Koriyama-based Magonote Travel hosted a one-day tour in mid-September to introduce cushy ways to take in the splendors of Shidahama Beach on Lake Inawashiro.

Around 40 people from and around the city of Koriyama took part in the tour, co-organized by Fukushima University associate professor Akiko Endo’s laboratory.

The participants gathered in Koriyama before heading to the beach by bus. Those who live in the city were also provided with taxi services between their homes and the gathering spot.

The glamping excursion itself took place at a private beach located next to a local hotel, Lakeside Banko, in Shidahama Beach. Wooden sofas, tables and beds were placed at the campsite by the lake near the beach, giving the area a tropical feel.

The glampers enjoyed beer, wine, highballs and soft drinks at a bar while they waited for marshmallows to roast by a campfire.

The tour also included 3½ hours of special activities, including stand-up paddle boarding, yacht cruising, hands and feet aroma massage and hot spring bathing at the Lakeside Banko hotel.

Those who joined the yacht cruise, conducted in cooperation with the Koriyama Yacht Club, were excited to sail under the gaze of Mount Bandai, with many saying it was their first time on such a vessel.

Aroma massage was also popular among women, who made up 80 percent of the participants, as it afforded them a way to unwind amid nature.

After the glampers worked up at appetite during their chosen activities, it was then time for the much-awaited sunset dinner.

Hot meals were prepared in a kitchen car and served buffet style. Basking in the warm glow of the sunset, the guests enjoyed the dishes that featured seasonal vegetables from Koriyama.

“We don’t have to bother about preparing our own meals. So we can all relax and enjoy the outdoors,” said Yukiko Takita, a 72-year-old company executive who participated in the event. “It’s also nice to be able to enjoy freshly baked food prepared in a kitchen car.”

Using the monitoring tour as a stepping stone, Magonote Travel is planning to introduce similar tours across Fukushima.

“We are planning take the kitchen car not only to glamping sites but also to farms and orchards to host food camps,” said Shonoshin Yamaguchi, 47, president of Magonote. “We want to spread the appeal of Fukushima in new styles.”

For inquiries, call Magonote Travel: 024-945-1313.

Part of Joban railway line reopens

October 21, 2017

7-km part of Joban Line reopens in Fukushima

Kyodo

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/10/21/national/7-km-part-joban-line-reopens-fukushima/#.WetDBHZpGos>

FUKUSHIMA – East Japan Railway Co. on Saturday partially reopened a section of the Joban Line in Fukushima Prefecture that had been suspended since the March 2011 mega-quake, tsunami and nuclear disasters struck.

Services resumed on a 6.9-km-long stretch between Tomioka Station in the town of Tomioka and Tatsuta Station in Naraha. But the remaining 20.8 km remains unconnected and JR East aims to reopen it by March 2020.

Around 30 people boarded the first train of the day, which left Tatsuta Station at 6:05 a.m.

“It must have been really difficult to recover to this phase. It is a happy development,” said Atsuko Kusano, 60, who rode it.

Kusano returned to Naraha in July last year after fleeing to Iwaki to take shelter.

“The tunnel looks the same as it was in the old days,” Kusano nostalgically recounted.

On the reopened section, the train passed close to a temporary storage place where plastic bags containing waste material from demolition work are stacked.

“Many residents were looking forward to the resumption of operation. We hope this will give a boost to the recovery of the town,” Tomioka Mayor Koichi Miyamoto said at a ceremony held to mark the resumption of service.

JR East began restoration work in June 2016 and began test runs in September.

The trains will make 11 round trips every day on the reopened section.

The remaining 20.8 km of track runs through an area near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Fukushima Governor explains to Brazilians about recovery

October 22, 2017

Governor promotes Fukushima's recovery in Brazil

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20171022_11/

The governor of Japan's Fukushima Prefecture has explained to people in Brazil to what extent his prefecture has recovered from the 2011 nuclear accident.

Masao Uchibori held a seminar in the Latin American nation's largest city of Sao Paulo on Saturday. Ninety people attended, including Japanese-Brazilians and locals.

Uchibori said monitoring checks and other measures are in place to ensure the safety of food produced in Fukushima. He said rice and sea fish are safe to eat, as their radiation levels have been below safety standards for two consecutive years.

The governor added that Fukushima's food exports once dropped, but have since been steadily increasing.

Uchibori noted that more than 54,000 people are still living in temporary housing.

He said Fukushima continues to launch various projects with the goal of becoming a prefecture not dependent on nuclear power.

Uchibori said that, to that end, his prefecture has been exchanging technology with such countries as Denmark and Germany, and advancing the development of renewable energy.

A Brazilian participant said he had wanted to know how Fukushima is coping and that he was surprised to learn how hard people in Fukushima have been working.

The event took place at a facility established under the "Japan House" project initiated by the Japanese government to introduce the country's culture overseas.

Uchibori arrived in Brazil on Friday to attend a ceremony marking the centenary of a group of Japanese-Brazilians who emigrated from Fukushima to Brazil before World War Two.

"Blue" house eerily silent



This house, once the pride and joy of a young family, will be pulled down to make a way for a storage facility for radiation-contaminated soil in Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture. (The Asahi Shimbun)

November 1, 2017

Fukushima town burns blue under bright, serious moonlight

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201711010056.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

FUTABA, Fukushima Prefecture--A full moon lights up the sky above the house, illuminating a photograph of two smiling children in their room. But no children play at this house.

A teddy bear lies abandoned in an awkward pose on the carpet as if suddenly dropped in an emergency. It is eerily silent. It has been for years.

It looks like the family who lived there just vanished. In fact, they did. This house is now part of a ghost town.

The entire population of Futaba, which co-hosts the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, is currently living outside of the town. Much of the town remains designated as a "difficult-to-return zone" more than six-and-a-half years after the nuclear disaster.

"My wife and I designed every single detail of this house," said a 43-year-old evacuee who gave permission for The Asahi Shimbun to set up cameras inside his former home. "But we could only live there for four years after building it."

On Oct. 4, several unmanned cameras were set up inside and around the house, which was once part of a newly developed housing area, with permission from the town government and the property owner.

The plan was to capture the atmosphere of this unlit, uninhabited neighborhood on a quiet night with a clear sky and full October moon.

A long-exposure shot captured the moonlight shining on a photo of the man's children in what was once their room. They were 5 and 7 at the time of the 2011 disaster. Now, they are a sixth-grader at elementary school and a second-grader at junior high school.

The family now lives in another newly built house in Ibaraki Prefecture.

The family spent much of the kids' childhood taking refuge in different places after they were evacuated from Futaba, so the children do not consider it their hometown.

"When I ask them where their hometown is, they answer, 'Saitama Prefecture' (where they once stayed)," the father said.

Those under the age of 15 are banned from entering the area, so the children have never visited the house since being evacuated shortly after the disaster.

He says he often ponders how he can "pass on Futaba" to his children.

The house he planned to fill with memories will soon just be a memory itself. **It will be torn down to help make way for a huge intermediate storage facility for radiation-contaminated soil.**

(This article was written by Tetsuro Takehana and Shigetaka Kodama.)

Do away with blanket radiation checks on rice?

November 5, 2017

Recent lack of tainted Fukushima rice raises doubts about blanket radiation checks

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/11/05/national/blanket-radiation-checks-fukushima-rice-debate/#.WgC6EnaDOos>

JJI

FUKUSHIMA – The blanket radiation checks conducted on rice grown in meltdown-hit Fukushima Prefecture have recently come under debate because none with radiation levels exceeding the safety limit has been found in recent years.

Some residents, including rice producers, want to continue the current system because there are consumers who still shun Fukushima produce. But conducting the checks is costly and requires a lot of manpower.

The Fukushima Prefectural Government hopes to make a decision by year-end on whether to alter the radiation checks starting with next year's crop, officials said.

The blanket checks were introduced after many parts of the prefecture were tainted by radioactive fallout released by the March 2011 triple core meltdown at the tsunami-hit Fukushima No. 1 power plant, managed by Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc.

The rice is checked bag by bag before shipment, with the safety threshold set at 100 becquerels per kilogram. Bags that pass inspection get certification labels before entering the distribution channels. According to Fukushima officials, the rice harvested last year and checked for radiation by the end of September came to 10.26 million bags. To cover the inspection expenses, the prefectural government collects ¥5 billion from Tepco each year. Some ¥500 million to ¥600 million in personnel expenses are covered by state subsidies.

The prefecture checked 53.13 million bags of rice for radiation between 2012 and 2016 at a total cost of ¥30.5 billion. The blanket check system began with the 867 bags from the 2012 harvest, which turned up 71 bags with excess radiation.

No tainted bags of rice were found between 2014 and 2016.

As of Oct. 25, radiation levels stood below the minimum detectable level of 25 becquerels for 99.99 percent of the 2016 rice that underwent the checks. The absence of tainted rice has led some people to

start questioning the blanket checks. One critic said continuing the system might have the unintended effect of fueling consumer concern about Fukushima rice.

To address the issue, the prefecture organized a group consisting of people from agricultural and consumer groups in July and asked it to study the checks based on the opinions of more than 300 farmers and seven wholesalers in the Tokyo metropolitan area. It will also conduct an online survey of 2,000 consumers nationwide.

Hisao Tomita, a farmer working in the city of Fukushima, called for continuing the blanket check system even though it is burdensome for producers as well.

As long as Fukushima rice is affected by negative rumors, radiation checks should be maintained even if they have to be scaled back, he said.

November 5, 2017

Blanket radiation checks on Fukushima rice under debate

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/11/05/national/blanket-radiation-checks-fukushima-rice-debate/#.Wf8l6HaDOos>

JJI

FUKUSHIMA – Blanket radiation checks on rice produced in nuclear disaster-hit Fukushima Prefecture have come under debate because no rice with radiation exceeding the safety limit has been found in recent years.

Some people, including producers, in the prefecture call for continuing the current system because there are consumers who still avoid Fukushima produce. But the blanket checks are costly and require a lot of manpower.

The prefectural government hopes to decide by year-end whether to change the radiation checks, starting with rice that will be harvested next year, officials said.

The blanket checks were introduced after many parts of the prefecture were contaminated with radioactive substances released because of the 2011 nuclear disaster at Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc.'s Fukushima No. 1 power plant.

Fukushima rice is put through radiation checks bag by bag before shipment. **The safety limit is set at 100 becquerels per 1 kg of rice.**

Rice that pass the checks have certification labels attached to the bags before being put through distribution channels.

According to Fukushima officials, the total amount of rice harvested last year and checked by the end of September this year reached 10.26 million bags.

To cover the expenses, the prefectural government collects ¥5 billion from Tepco each year. Some ¥500 million to ¥600 million in personnel expenses are covered with state subsidies.

The prefecture conducted radiation checks on a total of 53.13 million bags of rice harvested between 2012-2016. Total costs reached ¥30.5 billion.

The blanket check system began with the 2012 rice. At that time, 71 of the 867 bags checked exceeded the safety limit. But no such rice was detected at all for the 2014-2016 rice.

As of Oct. 25 this year, radiation levels stood below the minimum detectable level of 25 becquerels for 99.99 percent of the 2016 rice that underwent the checks.

The absence of above-limit rice has led some people to question the blanket check system. The continuance of the system may be making the unintended effect of fueling consumer concern about Fukushima rice, one critic said.

To discuss the fate of the blanket system, the prefecture set up a group with members of agricultural and consumer organizations in July this year.

The group will examine the issue based on opinions from more than 300 local farmers and seven wholesale companies in the Tokyo metropolitan area. It will also conduct an internet survey of 2,000 consumers nationwide.

Hisao Tomita, a farmer working in the city of Fukushima, called for the continuance of the current system even though it is burdensome also to producers.

As long as Fukushima rice is affected by negative rumors, radiation checks should be maintained even if they have to be scaled back, he said.

Too busy rebuilding

November 13, 2017

Tohoku areas snub Olympic program, focus on rebuilding

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201711130010.html>

By TAKAHIRO OKUBO/ Staff Writer

The vast majority of municipalities in the Tohoku region are snubbing a government exchange program related to the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, saying they are simply too busy rebuilding from the 2011 disaster. The central government wants to use “Tohoku reconstruction” as a theme for the Games and a way to promote the revival of devastated areas. But scorn is now being heaped on this idea.

In the run-up to the Summer Olympics, the government is pushing the Reconstruction “Arigato” Host Town international exchange program involving municipalities in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima, the three prefectures hardest hit by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

Under the program, disaster-hit municipalities will invite athletes, rescue workers and people who contributed relief goods to the victims to check on the rebuilding progress, allowing local residents to interact with people from across the globe.

Only 11 cities and villages of all 127 municipalities in the three prefectures applied for the program between Sept. 15 and Oct. 31.

“The most important phase of reconstruction is now getting under way,” said an official of a city in Iwate Prefecture that did not apply. “We are suffering from a worker shortage and can’t afford to think of the Tokyo Olympics.”

In fact, there was such little initial interest in the exchange program that officials of the Cabinet Secretariat had to urge cities, towns and villages to participate.

A central government source said that combining the Tohoku rebuilding efforts with the Olympics is nonsensical.

“Disaster recovery and the Olympics are basically two different things,” the source said.

The central government decided to extend the period of accepting applications because the results so far have been embarrassing.

Fukushima fair restarted

November 12, 2017

Spirits lifted by traditional fair restarted in Fukushima town

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201711120025.html>

By TETSURO TAKEHANA/ Staff Writer

TOMIOKA, Fukushima Prefecture--For the first time since residents were evacuated during the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident, a traditional fair to pray for a bumper harvest and prosperous businesses was revived and started here from Nov. 11.

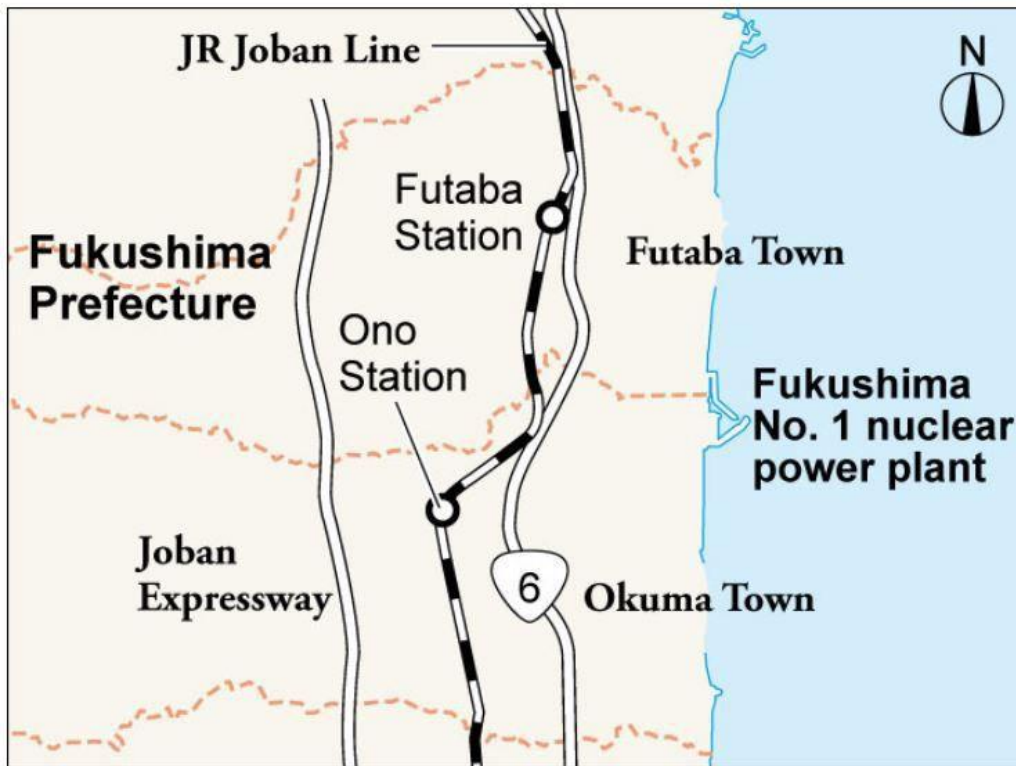
About 200 bamboo lanterns, each containing a written message to hope for the rebuilding of the local community and other wishes, were illuminated in the two-day event, called Ebisuko-ichi.

Fireworks were also set off in memory of those who died in the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, which triggered the nuclear disaster.

Local officials decided to resume the fair this year after the evacuation order was lifted in the spring for Tomioka, except for an area where high radiation levels persist. The town is located next to Okuma, which co-hosts the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

According to the organizing committee, Ebisuko-ichi, which dates back about 100 years, drew tens of thousands of visitors from in and outside the town to numerous street stalls before the triple meltdown.

Rebuilding "hub" in no-go zone



November 13, 2017

State creates 2nd 'hub' in no-entry zone around Fukushima plant

By NORIYOSHI OTSUKI/ Senior Staff Writer

OKUMA, Fukushima Prefecture--An area of a no-entry zone in a town that co-hosts the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant was designated a "rebuilding hub," part of the government's plan to lift the evacuation order in spring 2022.

The 860-hectare area in downtown Okuma is around JR Ono Station and located about 4 kilometers southwest of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. Now empty, the area used to be home to the town's government office and shopping centers.

It accounts for 18 percent of the "difficult-to-return zone" in Okuma.

The central government's designation on Nov. 10, its second around the nuclear plant, means that full-scale work will soon start on decontamination, water maintenance and infrastructure rebuilding in the Okuma hub using public funds.

One specific area targeted in the cleanup will be around JR Ono Station on the JR Joban Line. Operations of the line in the area are scheduled to resume by the end of fiscal 2019.

The government plans to lift the evacuation order for the entire hub by spring 2022.

An estimated 1,500 residents are expected to return to their homes in the area after the order is lifted.

More than 1,000 workers involved in decommissioning the nuclear plant also plan to move to the hub, according to the government.

The government estimates 2,600 people will reside in the hub five years after the evacuation order is lifted.

Rice paddies and vegetable fields in the hub will be maintained, and 130 residents are expected to resume farming in the area.

In September, the government designated as a rebuilding hub part of Futaba town, the other co-host of the nuclear plant.

It was the first such designation since the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami caused the nuclear disaster in March 2011.

Our children are being used

November 13, 2017

Nuclear School Quandary (NHK video)

<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/videos/20171113152405093/>

Iitate is trying to get people back (through their children)

The authorities will offer a brand-new school, free meals, individual tuition etc. (the interim one will close so people have to choose where the children will go)

It is a dilemma for the parents (a local survey says only 90 children will join the new school 343 will not)

"The children are being held hostages for the construction (of the school)", says one parent.

Wild boars at night



Free-roaming wild boars emerge in the shopping avenue against the backdrop of buildings damaged by the powerful earthquake on March 11, 2011, in Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture, on Oct. 4. (The Asahi Shimbun)

November 16, 2017

Wild boars roam ghost town near Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201711160038.html>

By TETSURO TAKEHANA/ Staff Writer

FUTABA, Fukushima Prefecture--Illuminated by the light of the moon that drifts in and out of the clouds, wild boars swaggering down a shopping avenue of a desolate town here are captured on camera, like ghostly swine.

The entire population of the town of Futaba, which co-hosts the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, is currently living elsewhere. Almost all of Futaba remains designated a "difficult-to-return zone" more than six and a half years after the nuclear disaster.

The streetscape of the area that is a no-entry zone at night remains as it was when the disaster occurred. Several cameras were set up in the area with the cooperation of the town government of Futaba.

In October, 16,166 photographs were taken in long exposures under the faint light of the moon. In some of those images, free-roaming wild boars as well as damaged buildings along the shopping avenue that were previously in operation could be seen.

The central government designated a part of difficult-to-return zones including the shopping avenue as a "rebuilding hub" in September. It plans to lift the evacuation order for the entire hub in 2022. However, it is not known whether the residents will return to what is the current ghost town.

Tourism in Fukushima

November 19, 2017

Fukushima city has tourism plans for treasured Akaiyachi wetland

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/11/19/national/fukushima-city-tourism-plans-treasured-akaiyachi-wetland/#.WhGvGnmDOos>

Fukushima Minpo

The city of Aizuwakamatsu, Fukushima Prefecture, is making plans to lure tourists to its Akaiyachi wetland, a 70-hectare marsh designated as a national natural treasure.

The Aizuwakamatsu Municipal Government plans to build a promenade and parking lots on 611-meter Mount Okubo, which overlooks the wetland, in the coming years and perhaps a boardwalk through it after lifting a ban on entering the area.

The wetland, in the eastern Aizuwakamatsu town of Minato, is 525 meters above sea level and contains subarctic plants such as sphagnum moss, cranberries and cloudberry, all of which are common on Russia's Sakhalin Island. It was designated a natural treasure in 1928.

The city is considering renovating an unpaved road, which stretches for about 1 km along the base of the mountain, to turn it into a promenade with parking lots after discussing the idea with the owners of the mountain.

The city also plans to set up a stele engraved with a tanka about the wetland by Emperor Hirohito, posthumously known as Emperor Showa, in the northern part of the wetland.

But how to preserve the habitat of the flora after the swamp is opened to the public remains a big hurdle.

The main problem is that sphagnum moss dies easily when stepped upon. The city will consult a committee of biologists leading efforts to preserve the land to see whether its tourism plans are feasible. If the committee approves, the city will discuss the project with the Cultural Affairs Agency.

The town of Minato has a population of about 1,800, down by about 2,700 in the past 60 years. In 2015 volunteers set up a committee to revitalize and develop the area by drawing on its history and natural attractions. Some residents have demanded that Akaiyachi be used for tourism.

"We'd like to search for a way to utilize the state-designated natural treasure for tourism, after carefully considering how to protect it," said an Aizuwakamatsu municipal official.

Shoichi Kobiyama, head of the association to revitalize the Minato area, said, "We'll think about ways to develop tourism while protecting and taking care of the local nature."

This section, appearing every third Monday, features topics and issues covered by the Fukushima Minpo, the largest newspaper in Fukushima Prefecture. The original article was published on Oct. 29.

Collecting signs of chaos

November 23, 2017

Signs of tumult linger at vacated hospital near Fukushima plant

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201711230031.html>

By HIROSHI ISHIZUKA/ Staff Writer

The interior of Ono Hospital in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, on Nov. 22 attests to the chaotic evacuation of the facility following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster in March 2011. (Yosuke Fukudome)

Members of a Fukushima University team, commissioned by the Fukushima prefectural government, check the cluttered interior of Ono Hospital in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, on Nov. 22. (Yosuke Fukudome)

<image: clip_image001.jpg>

OKUMA, Fukushima Prefecture--Dislodged panels dangle precariously from the ceiling, while overturned furniture and garbage create obstacles on the floor. Unused stretchers are scattered in a hallway, and utensils, styrene foam containers and empty tins are concentrated in other areas.

The mess, untouched for years, is a testament to the chaos of the frantic evacuation at Ono Hospital here after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, triggered the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Reporters were allowed to step inside the prefectural-run hospital on Nov. 22 for the first time since the facility, located about 4 kilometers from the nuclear plant, was closed six years ago.

About 120 people were at the hospital at the time of the evacuation, including 30 inpatients. The others were hospital staff, outpatients receiving treatment for injuries suffered in the quake and tsunami, and residents who took shelter there.

Many papers were left on a white board describing the conditions of the patients, such as “Breathing difficulty after being swamped by the tsunami” and “Fractured lower leg.”

Chairs in the lobby had clearly been used as makeshift beds. Documents in cardboard boxes were strewn about in the staff room.

According to the prefectural government, the hospital received the central government’s evacuation order at 5:45 a.m. on March 12.

Two large buses arrived at the hospital around 7 a.m. to take people to a safe distance from the crippled plant.

But it was unclear where exactly they should go, according to Keiichi Kimoto, a doctor who evacuated on one of the buses.

“We were advised to head west as far as possible,” said Kimoto, 65.

Around 9 a.m., the buses reached Kawauchi, a village located outside the 20-kilometer radius of the crippled plant called the no-entry zone.

That afternoon, they learned that an explosion had rocked the No. 1 reactor building at the plant, releasing a large amount of highly radioactive substances. They stayed in the village for three days.

All of Okuma has been evacuated since the meltdowns at the plant.

The Fukushima prefectural government plans to build a facility dedicated to passing down lessons learned from the catastrophe.

As part of that effort, **a team consisting of Fukushima University officials and others visited the hospital on Nov. 22 to collect and preserve items attesting to the tumult resulting from the triple disaster.**

They collected 23 articles, including a wall clock that stopped after the earthquake struck.

Disposing of nuclear waste, but where?

November 27, 2017

EDITORIAL: Public hearings on nuclear waste need rethink to dispel distrust

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201711270021.html>

Selecting the site and method for the final disposal of high-level radioactive waste, which is derived from spent fuel from nuclear power reactors, represents a major conundrum.

The government's public hearings on the issue should be fundamentally revamped to enable substantial discussions on a national level.

The Agency for Natural Resources and Energy and the Nuclear Waste Management Organization of Japan (NUMO) have been holding explanatory meetings on the matter, prefecture by prefecture, since October. It was learned recently that students who attended those meetings had been offered remuneration in cash and other items for their attendance.

The finding concerns a total of 39 participants at five venues, including in Tokyo and Saitama Prefecture. Officials said a contractor commissioned with public relations for young audiences made the offer at its own discretion, which had no impact on the course of discussions at the meetings. But such a practice could hurt the fairness and trustworthiness of those public hearings.

NUMO has rightly opened investigations into the past practices and begun weighing measures to prevent a recurrence.

At the same time, the organizers should also face up squarely to other problems that have emerged during the meetings that have been held to date.

Each explanatory meeting is made up of two sessions.

The first session is centered, among other things, on a presentation of the government's Nationwide Map of Scientific Features for Geological Disposal, which shows which parts of Japan are eligible for being candidate final disposal sites.

The participants split into smaller groups to exchange views during the second session.

At most of the venues, the meeting turnout has failed to reach the maximum capacity of 100 participants. The turnout has been particularly poor during the second sessions, with only about 20 to 30 people attending.

The public hearings are being held on weekday afternoons for reasons of availability for the organizers. That is apparently making it difficult for working citizens to attend.

The organizers say they plan to cover all prefectures of Japan, except Fukushima Prefecture, during a six-month period. Holding the meetings in line with that predetermined timetable may have become an end in itself.

The contractor, on its part, mobilized the students perhaps because in surmising the organizers' intent, it believed that small audiences, particularly with youths underrepresented, did not make for a good image. Needless to say, the public hearings are not being held just to denote that they have been held. They are being organized to help the issues of spent nuclear fuel shared on a national level and enable substantial discussions on them.

One participant at the Tokyo venue said that a video screened at the opening of the meeting was "inappropriate" because it presented the nuclear fuel recycling program, which is about extracting and reusing plutonium and uranium from reprocessed spent fuel, in a way that could be taken to imply as if the procedure had been established.

The nuclear fuel recycling program has evidently failed, as symbolized by the recent decision to decommission the Monju fast-breeder reactor. Direct disposal of nuclear waste, in which spent fuel is buried without being reprocessed, has become the mainstream method in countries other than Japan, not the least in Finland, where a final disposal site has been selected.

The government and NUMO should convey information that may be inconvenient to them in lending their ears to a broad spectrum of opinions.

As long as they stick to a stance of only allowing discussions premised on the continuation of the current nuclear power policy, that would only intensify distrust among the public and would do little in the way of gaining broader understanding toward the selection of a final disposal site.

Local economy dependent on nukes...

November 28, 2017

Fukui's push for reactor restarts reflects local economy's reliance on nuclear power

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/11/28/national/fukuis-push-reactor-restarts-reflects-local-economys-reliance-nuclear-power/#.Wh1Sc3mDOos>

Kyodo

Fukui Gov. Issei Nishikawa's decision on Monday to give the go-ahead to restarting two reactors at the Oi nuclear plant highlights the local economy's dependence on nuclear power, even 6½ years after the March 2011 Fukushima disaster.

At a news conference, Nishikawa offered what he sees as the merits of a restart, saying the plant will "have a (positive) impact on the medical, agriculture and fisheries industries."

The reactors at the Kansai Electric Power Co. plant, located on the Sea of Japan coast, are set to go online starting in January.

Nishikawa's comments reflect how the prolonged suspension of nuclear plants has weakened the local economy. Fukui Prefecture is home to the highest number of nuclear power plants among all 47 prefectures.

The decision to bring online reactors 3 and 4 at the Oi plant would make the prefecture the first since the 2011 nuclear disaster to have two active nuclear plants.

Fukui is also host to Kansai Electric's Takahama plant, where two reactors have already resumed operation.

The Osaka-based utility, meanwhile, is just as reliant on nuclear power. Before the Fukushima disaster, nuclear power accounted for more than 40 percent of its power generation. But following the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 complex and subsequent nuclear power plant suspensions, fuel costs for alternative thermal power weighed on the utility's bottom line.

The two reactors at Oi, offline in September 2013 for regular checkups, cleared the Nuclear Regulation Authority's stricter post-Fukushima safety screenings.

Kansai Electric is planning to bring a total of seven reactors online — including the two Oi reactors given the go ahead this week and reactors 3 and 4 at the Takahama plant.

The three others — all of which are over 40 years old — have won approval for extended operation. They are reactors 1 and 2 at the Takahama plant and reactor 3 at the Mihama plant.

By boosting the ratio of nuclear in its power generation mix, Kansai Electric is looking to top tough competition with gas companies and rival power sources.

An industry insider believes that Kansai Electric may be aiming for a head start in the race by lowering electricity prices after bringing the reactors online.

But restarts remain a challenge, as more spent nuclear fuel only increases the need for storage facilities.

The Oi, Mihama and Takahama plants will all approach full capacity for spent fuel over a five-year period from the time of the restarts, according to an estimate by the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan.

In response to Nishikawa's request for a storage facility, Shigeki Iwane, president of Kansai Electric, said the utility would present a plan in 2018.

But the details for such a facility are still unclear due to the difficulty of finding a location.

Nishikawa wants it outside his prefecture.

Fukushima exposition in Taiwan

November 30, 2017

Taiwan holds Fukushima exhibition

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20171130_32/

A civic group in Taiwan is holding an exhibition this week, showing how people in Fukushima are trying to rebuild their lives 6 years after the 2011 nuclear accident.

The exhibition in Taipei features about 70 photos and videos. They were taken by 6 Taiwanese civic groups at several communities near the nuclear power plant.

The videos include interviews with residents recently returned home after being forced to evacuate. There is also an interview of an elderly woman who lost her husband in the March 2011 tsunami.

The group that organized the event says it hopes the exhibition will raise awareness in Taiwan of how the situation in Fukushima has improved.

Taiwan continues to ban food imports from Fukushima and 4 other nearby prefectures more than 6 years after the accident.

The exhibition has drawn more than 10,000 visitors in its first 5 days.

A woman in her 60s said she was moved by the images of people striving for a new start. She said that she now wants to visit Fukushima someday.

No more certificates needed to import Fukushima rice and seafood in Europe

December 2, 2017

EU eases curbs on imports of Fukushima rice and seafood

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201712020035.html>

By TETSUSHI YAMAMURA/ Staff Writer

The European Union on Dec. 1 eased import restrictions on farm and marine products from Japan that it tightened in the aftermath of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

After the catastrophe, 54 countries and regions imposed restrictions on imports of farm produce and seafood from Japan. Twenty-five countries have already lifted all restrictions.

The government plans to step up efforts to call on other countries to ease regulations.

The EU decision means that exporters of rice grown in Fukushima Prefecture and some seafood and related products from there and neighboring areas will not be required to present certificates to show that the items have been tested for radioactivity.

With regard to rice from Japan, the final barrier to exports to the EU has now been lifted.

The easing of controls follows Saudi Arabia's decision in November to lift all restrictions of imports of foodstuffs from areas affected by the nuclear disaster.

The United States has also moved to ease restrictions for some seafood and related products from Fukushima Prefecture.

According to Fukushima prefectural authorities, exports of locally grown farm and marine products plunged to 2 tons in fiscal 2012 from 153 tons in fiscal 2010.

But imports have gradually bounced back and are now approaching pre-disaster levels.

Among countries that still maintain restrictions are nine big importers of Japanese agricultural and marine products, such as Hong Kong, the United States, Taiwan, China and South Korea.

They continue to ban imports of foodstuff from Fukushima Prefecture and surrounding areas.

For example, China bans imports of commodities from Fukushima and nine other prefectures.

South Korea has maintained a ban on imports of fisheries products from Fukushima and seven other prefectures, which has dealt a blow to sea squirt farmers.

Before the Fukushima disaster, 70 to 80 percent of farmed sea squirt was exported.

A struggle to repay loans

December 8, 2017

3/11 survivors may struggle to repay loans

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20171208_02/

Many people in areas of Japan hit by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami worry that they may have trouble repaying loans extended by local governments to help in rebuilding their lives.

Municipalities can lend up to 31,000 dollars to each household affected by disasters.

The Cabinet Office says that as of the end of October, municipalities have lent some 460 million dollars in over 29,000 cases related to the March 11th disaster.

Three prefectures were hit hardest by the disaster. Households in Miyagi were lent the most at about 360 million dollars. Fukushima came next at roughly 52 million dollars and those in Iwate received some 24.6 million dollars.

As of the end of October, nearly 90 percent of planned public housing units for disaster survivors had been completed in the 3 prefectures.

But pensioners and people whose income has dropped since the disaster worry about their ability to pay off the loans. Repayment periods began this month.

Many people used the lending system after the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake in western Japan. Roughly 27.5 million dollars in loans have not been repaid in Kobe City.

Listen to children and families afflicted by thyroid cancer

December 7, 2017

Many children diagnosed with thyroid cancer after 3.11 disasters, families still worried

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20171207/p2a/00m/0na/012000c>

Nearly 80 percent of respondents in a survey by a group supporting children diagnosed with thyroid cancer in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster say they remain worried about the cancer, despite the prognosis for those who receive appropriate treatment being good.

- **【Related】** News Navigator: Do young people's cancers progress more quickly?
- **【Related】** 10 more thyroid cancer cases diagnosed in Fukushima
- **【Related】** Families of Fukushima thyroid cancer patients launch support group

The survey was conducted by the **3.11 Fund for Children with Thyroid Cancer, an independent, not-for-profit organization providing support for child patients of thyroid cancer and their families**. It was sent in August to 67 households of people who were living in Fukushima Prefecture at the time of the outbreak of the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant in March 2011 and whose medical expenses the fund has helped to cover. A total of 52 households responded -- a response rate of about 78 percent. Twelve of the respondents had received treatment themselves, while seven were fathers and 33 were mothers of those who had been treated.

A total of 40 respondents, or 77 percent, said they remained worried. When asked specifically what they were worried about, 23 people said "a relapse," nine each cited "metastasis" and "health status in general," while five each said they were worried about "pregnancy and childbirth" and "finding a job and working."

Among children, some worried about cancer testing being scaled back. A total of 28 respondents called for the status quo to be maintained, while another 17 respondents called for the testing system to be enhanced. None said it should be downsized.

"Excessive diagnosis" has been blamed in the past for the large number of thyroid cancer patients in the wake of the nuclear disaster, but when given space to write their own opinions, some respondents were supportive of testing from the perspective of early detection of cancer, saying, "It's better than finding out too late," and "If a person has cancer, they'll feel better if it's removed."

The fund's representative director, Hisako Sakiyama, commented, "**There's a need to listen to what the afflicted people and their families want, and to hear what problems they are facing.**"

Fukushima farmers and the taint of radiation

December 24, 2017

Fukushima farmers looking for authoritative ways to shed nuclear stigma

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/12/24/national/fukushima-farmers-looking-authoritative-ways-shed-nuclear-stigma/#.Wj-dQ3kiGic>

Fukushima Minpo

In light of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear crisis, the Fukushima Prefectural Government is hoping to find a new, faster and easier way to certify the safety of homegrown rice to ease the burden on local farmers. The blanket radiation-screening method used in Fukushima is not known for being quick and efficient, yet the government and farmers are stuck with it for the time being until an alternative that is equally assuring to consumers can be found.

Struggling to counter misinformation about locally grown produce stemming from the core meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in 2011, farmers are looking to the globally recognized Good Agricultural Practice system, a third-party standard that certifies adherence to the standards recommended by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. The farmers hope GAP can help convince consumers that their products are safe, and holders of GAP certification are rising nationwide.

In addition to the GAP auditing system, there is a Japanese version dubbed “JGAP” recommended by the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Ministry to verify that farmers have recorded their production processes and had their products screened and certified by designated firms and groups. As of 2016, about 4,000 JGAP certificates had been issued.

In May, the Fukushima Prefectural Government vowed to make itself the prefecture with the most GAP certificates. As of Nov. 20, Fukushima had acquired 17 GAP and JGAP certificates. The prefecture plans to acquire more than 140 certificates by the 2020 Olympics.

Separately, Fukushima designed its own verification system (dubbed “FGAP”) to reflect its experience with the nuclear crisis. In addition to the list of items inspected under GAP, such as food safety and environmental protection, FGAP adds a category pertaining to countermeasures for radioactive substances.

FGAP calls for the management of rice paddy radiation levels and for voluntary radiation screenings before shipment. To promote this GAP variation, the Fukushima Prefectural Government plans to cover all expenses linked to the acquisition and renewal of FGAP certificates.

An official from the farm ministry’s Agricultural Production Bureau called GAP an “effective method to raise confidence” in food safety.

The Finance Ministry’s Budget Bureau, which assesses cost allocations for the blanket screening method, said the two systems are “different in nature but looking in the same direction.”

In 2012, the Fukushima Prefectural Government began screening all rice grown in the prefecture after excessive levels of radioactive cesium were detected in the previous year’s crop.

The number of samples exceeding 100 becquerels per kilogram — the government’s safety limit for the isotope — has dropped each year, and no samples tested since 2015 have been found over the limit.

Blanket screening costs an estimated ¥6 billion per year, and Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc, which runs the Fukushima No. 1 plant, shoulders at least ¥5 billion of that. The remainder is covered by state funds.

The prefecture's environmental protection and farm division said it is keen to speed up efforts to quell false rumors about rice contamination.

But gaining GAP certification is no small feat. For example, farmers have to clear a checklist of 209 items, though there are none pertaining to radiation measures.

JGAP, which has a checklist of 131 items, urges farmers to check the safety of their soil, water and fertilizer, in addition to their rice, via inspections or other means.

As for FGAP, 30 of its 97 categories deal with measures to address radioactive substances.

Chuji Kuroe, a 61-year-old rice farmer in Kawamata, is hardly excited when it's time for the fall harvest. Every year, Kuroe produces about 30 tons of rice. For the safety checks, he has to pack them into 30-kg bags for storage, which means about 1,000 bags each year. These bags are then inspected by a series of measuring instruments before shipment.

It is time-consuming to label every bag with a bar code for inspection, and carrying and preparing each one for analysis has taken a physical toll on Kuroe.

In addition, the lack of consumer and retailer awareness regarding certification frustrates many farmers. "Despite all the trouble I went through, if the consumers do not know much about what GAP is, it will not lead to an understanding of the safety of agricultural products," said a 57-year-old farmer in southern Fukushima.

According to the nonprofit GAP Research Institute's survey covering about 1,000 people in Japan, 58 percent did not know what GAP is and 33 percent said they had only heard of the name. Only 9 percent said they knew what GAP was.

This section features topics and issues covered by the Fukushima Minpo, the largest newspaper in Fukushima Prefecture. The original article was published on Dec. 15.

End of Fukushima "miracle pine"

December 24, 2017

Fukushima: Pine tree lit before felling

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20171224_02/

A pine tree that survived the 2011 Great East Japan earthquake and tsunami is lit for its last days before it is to be felled next week.

The 25-meter-tall tree in Minamisoma City in Fukushima Prefecture is known as the "miracle pine tree."

The tree stands in Kashima district. Locals have been carefully preserving it as a symbol of hope in their restoration efforts.

But the tree's roots have withered due to being exposed to the sea's salt water for a long time.

The pine tree was illuminated by several lights around it on Saturday. Locals, apparently feeling sad to

lose the tree, touched and photographed it as a way to say farewell.

The tree is scheduled to be cut down next Wednesday. In the same area, a forest will be planted, with the aim of acting as a protective barrier from strong winds and high waves.

Health problems hit children, particularly in Fukushima

December 22, 2017

Japanese school kids post worst eyesight on record as obesity makes comeback in Fukushima: survey

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/12/22/national/japanese-school-kids-post-worst-eyesight-record-obesity-makes-comeback-fukushima-survey/#.Wj0ex3kiGic>

JJI

The number of elementary and junior high school students with an uncorrected visual acuity of less than 1.0 has set record highs in fiscal 2017, an education ministry survey on eyesight and weight showed Friday.

The results might be the result of gazing at smartphone screens from close range and other daily habits, a ministry official said.

The survey was based on the results of health checkups taken by children between 5 and 17 from April to June. It covered 24.9 percent of the checkup results, or 3.41 million children.

The ratio of elementary school kids who had uncorrected eyesight of less than 1.0 rose to 32.46 percent, while the ratio for junior high students hit 56.33 percent. Both are new records, a preliminary report on the survey said.

On obesity, the survey found that 6.53 percent of 5-year-olds and 15.23 percent of 11-year-olds in Fukushima Prefecture weigh at least 20 percent more than standard — the highest on record in the meltdown-hit prefecture.

The rise in obesity is believed to reflect restrictions on outdoor activities caused by fears of radiation exposure from the 2011 triple core meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant managed by Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc.

Of the 13 school grades spanned by children between 5 and 17, Fukushima had the highest share of fat children in the 47 prefectures over six or seven grades between fiscal 2012 and 2014, reflecting a sudden jump from fiscal 2011.

But the number of grades in which Fukushima topped the rankings fell to zero in fiscal 2015 and just one in fiscal 2016, before climbing to five in fiscal 2017.

The ratio of elementary, junior high and high school students with ear problems, excluding disabilities, hit record highs as well. Many of the problems involved earwax buildup, officials said.

Meanwhile, only 37.32 percent of junior high school students and 47.30 percent of their high school peers had cavities, both record lows.

The proportion of children with decayed teeth has been on the decline as a whole after peaking in the 1970s and 1980s, the report showed.

Radiation cleanup in Futaba



December 25, 2017

Decontamination work begins in no-entry zone

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20171225_20/

Decontamination and demolition of houses has begun in an area affected by the 2011 nuclear accident in Fukushima Prefecture.

The area in Futaba Town is designated as a post-disaster reconstruction hub inside the "no-entry" zone set up due to high radiation levels.

The Environment Ministry plans to administer the project, which will cover a 555-hectare area within the town.

Town Mayor Shiro Izawa spoke to the workers at the start of the operation on Monday.

He asked them to keep in mind that residents are looking forward to returning to the town as early as possible.

The first phase will continue until July next year and cover an area of about 7 hectares.

Workers will initially do weeding along roads near a railway station and around public facilities. They will then remove contaminated top soil, and demolish about 55 houses and public buildings.

December 25, 2017

Town of Futaba kicks off radiation cleanup with eye on 2022 revival

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/12/25/national/town-futaba-kicks-off-radiation-cleanup-eye-2022-revival/#.WkDfbHkiGic>

Kyodo

FUKUSHIMA – Cleanup work kicked off Monday to make radiation-tainted Futaba, one of the towns hosting the meltdown-hit Fukushima No. 1 power plant, habitable again by around spring 2022 under a government-led recovery project.

Cleanup and demolition crews are trying to decontaminate the town, which was tainted with fallout from the plant’s triple core meltdown after the March 2011 mega-quake and tsunami. The plant’s operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc., is shouldering the cost.

The work at Futaba marks the beginning of a series of government-led projects to make areas designated as special reconstruction zones livable again, with an emphasis on new infrastructure.

About 96 percent of Futaba has been designated as “difficult to return to” zone, and an evacuation advisory is still in place for the entire town, which hosts the stricken power plant with neighboring Okuma.

The cleanup will be concentrated in the special reconstruction zone, which covers 555 hectares accounting for 11 percent of Futaba.

“The reconstruction efforts will help motivate residents to return to their homes,” Futaba Mayor Shiro Izawa told officials involved in the project.

“We want you to carry out the work while thinking about the feelings of the citizens awaiting the day they can return,” he said.

Overseen by the Environment Ministry, the first steps will involve removing the top layer of soil in the area near Futaba Station, trimming grass along the streets, and dismantling nearly 60 houses and public facilities.

Along with Futaba, seven municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture have been designated as zones that are difficult to return to.

The government is aiming to lift the evacuation advisory near Futaba station by the end of March 2020, when the Joban Line plans to fully resume operation.

Some evacuees from Futaba had mixed emotions about the start of the work.

A 69-year-old woman residing in a temporary shelter in Iwaki said that her house is in the special reconstruction zone but that she had given up hope of returning because she evacuated over six years ago.

“If this was two or three years after the disaster, I might have a choice to return. But my house became run-down and I got old. Realistically speaking, I don’t think I can live there now,” she said.

On the other hand, Masamichi Matsumoto, who also fled to Iwaki, welcomed the project, saying, “I’m glad that a step has been taken to rebuild the town for the future.”

He said it is unlikely many citizens will return, partly because a nearby facility will be storing contaminated soil collected from the cleanup work.

“But I hope that Futaba will become a town where people can visit some day,” Matsumoto, 54, added.

Good bye to miracle pine



“The lone pine of Kashima” is being lowered to the ground on the coast of the Kashima district of Minami-Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, on Dec. 27. (Yosuke Fukudome)

December 28, 2017

Tsunami-hit area bids farewell to ‘lone pine of Kashima’

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201712280026.html>

By SHINTARO EGAWA/ Staff Writer

MINAMI-SOMA, Fukushima Prefecture--The only pine tree that survived the 2011 tsunami on a beach here and became a symbol of resilience was cut down on Dec. 27.

A ceremony was held on the beach in the city’s Kashima district to bid farewell to “the lone pine of Kashima.”

“We received great strength and moral support from you,” Kazuo Goga, 77, leader of a volunteer group that worked to preserve the tree, said in a speech at the ceremony.

The tree was one of tens of thousands planted along the beach for 3 kilometers north to south as a windbreak forest.

However, the Great East Japan Earthquake spawned a tsunami that washed away many of the trees on March 11, 2011. Other trees later died after being submerged in seawater for a prolonged period. The sole survivor itself was visibly growing weaker.

The decision was made to fell the pine tree because the entire coastal area is scheduled to be tidied up for the creation of a new disaster prevention forest.

Wood from the tree will be used mainly for nameplates on the home of local residents.

Miracle pine tree' cut down

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20171227_21/

A pine tree that survived the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in eastern Japan and became a symbol of hope for local residents has been cut down.

The 25-meter-tall tree in the city of Minamisoma in Fukushima Prefecture was known as the "miracle pine tree". It was the only pine in the coastal forest to survive the tsunami.

Locals have been carefully trying to preserve the tree located in the district of Kashima.

But authorities decided to cut it down because of damage it suffered after being submerged in seawater after the tsunami. The area will be replanted with trees to create a disaster-prevention greenbelt.

About 100 local residents took part in a ceremony to bid farewell to the tree on Wednesday.

A community representative, Yoshito Kamada, said the memories of the tree will live on forever.

The lone tree was then cut down with a chain saw, 6 years and 9 months after the disaster.

The wood will be used to make nameplates for residents.

Baseball against "specter" of radiation



A children's baseball tournament at a park in Fukushima, Japan, Nov. 5, 2017. Fukushima's residents are hoping that a renewed emphasis on youth sports, as well as new baseball and basketball franchises, will help change perceptions in a region that for many remains defined by the 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown. (Seth Berkman/ © 2017 The New York Times)

December 31, 2017

In Shadow of Disaster, Fukushima Responds With 'Play Ball'

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/SDI201712310554.html>

By SETH BERKMAN/ © 2017 The New York Times

FUKUSHIMA, Japan--A sea of brightly colored banners and advertisements decorated the Fukushima train station in early November to celebrate coming road races and Fukushima United, the local soccer club. There are new professional baseball and basketball franchises in the region, too. They carry inspirational names like the Hopes and the Firebonds, the latter signifying the spirit of a team connecting to the community, said 21-year-old point guard Wataru Igari.

For an area with a growing interest in sports, the biggest boon came in March when the International Olympic Committee approved Fukushima to host baseball and softball games during the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

Yet Fukushima remains defined by tragedy.

The 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami caused meltdowns and radiation leaks at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. Devastation touched every corner of Fukushima prefecture, which is about the size of Connecticut. Among the population of nearly 2 million residents, more than 160,000 near the power plant fled or were evacuated, while an estimated 16,000 people died.

The disaster also damaged the Fukushima name. Tourism declined. The rest of Japan shunned produce or materials from Fukushima.

Almost seven years later, pockets of the prefecture--mainly in its capital city, also called Fukushima--are attempting to change its perception through sports.

"We are looked at like Chernobyl," said Saito Nobuyuki, who was born in Fukushima and now owns Sportsland, a sporting goods store in the city. "It's difficult to change."

Akinori Iwamura is among those hoping to rehabilitate Fukushima's name.

Iwamura was the starting second baseman for the Tampa Bay Rays in the 2008 World Series. He also won two World Baseball Classic championships with Japan and played in the Nippon Professional Baseball League for 13 years.

Today, Iwamura, 38, is toiling at the lowest levels of organized baseball. He is the manager of the Fukushima Hopes, a semipro team whose games are sparsely attended; Iwamura equated the level of play to Class AA baseball in the United States.

"I call myself a missionary," Iwamura said. "Even though it's a negative way many people know the name of Fukushima, we have to change it into a positive way."

Iwamura was preparing to play for the Rakuten Golden Eagles when the earthquake and tsunami struck. Although he is from Ehime prefecture in southern Japan, Iwamura said he felt it had become his "destiny" to help rebuild Fukushima after he retired. Among those who encouraged him, Iwamura said, was Chicago Cubs manager Joe Maddon, who was his coach with the Rays.

Iwamura could have a big stage to help bolster the area's image when Fukushima Azuma Baseball Stadium, the home park of the Hopes, hosts Olympic Games in 2020. Iwamura sees in that another opportunity to inform the world about life beyond the disaster.

"When they go back to their country, they can tell their impression to the local people of their countries so it will bring more people to come for tourism," he said.

The stadium is in the capital, about 90 minutes from Tokyo by high-speed train and 55 miles west of the Fukushima Daiichi plant. The city did not sustain extensive damage as did towns closer to the plant and the coast, which concerns critics who believe the conditions of more seriously affected areas will be ignored because of the Olympics.

Immediately after the announcement in March that Fukushima would host baseball, anti-nuclear activists denounced the move. They argued that it created a false impression that Fukushima had returned to normal and glossed over the remaining hardships faced by an estimated 120,000 residents who still cannot--and may never--return to their homes.

"The Japanese government wants to show the fake side of Fukushima," said Hajime Matsukubo, secretary-general for the Citizens' Nuclear Information Center in Tokyo. In his office, Matsukubo showed a copy of the Fukushima Minpo newspaper, which listed radiation levels of all the towns in Fukushima prefecture like box scores in a daily sports section.

Azby Brown, who works for Safecast, an organization that helps citizens independently measure environmental data like radiation levels, said Olympic visitors staying near the stadium for a week would probably not be exposed to higher-than-normal radiation levels. But he also disagreed with the government's messaging about Fukushima.

"Communities have been destroyed, there has been no real accountability, the environmental contamination will persist for decades and will require vigilance and conscientious monitoring the entire time," Brown wrote in an email. "People who accept the radiation measurements and make a rational decision to return still live with a nagging concern and doubt, as if they're living in a haunted house."

When Japan was awarded the 2020 Olympics in September 2013, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe assured the IOC that "the situation is under control" in Fukushima.

Four years later, Brown said, public infrastructure projects in destroyed areas have been delayed because construction companies became too focused on gaining Olympic-related work around Tokyo.

Gov. Masao Uchibori of Fukushima prefecture contended that the area was showing notable progress in reconstruction. Uchibori cited the continual reopening of tourist sites in the area and the growing influence of sports on civic pride.

He added that the rebuilding of contaminated areas and a declining population cannot be overlooked, calling these contrasting aspects the “light and shadow” of Fukushima.

“At this moment, I cannot find any negative point,” to holding Olympics events in Fukushima, Uchibori said, “but I would like to work in cooperation with the organizing committee and the central government in order to make people think it was good to hold the events in Fukushima.”

Uchibori added that “rumors” of Fukushima’s condition contributed to the shadow over the prefecture. Large swaths of Fukushima remain uninhabitable, and it has been estimated that cleanup at the plant will take up to 40 years and cost almost \$200 billion.

Still, some residents see hope in the Olympics.

“If the Olympics doesn’t happen in Fukushima now, the image of Fukushima doesn’t change for a long time,” said Aya Watanabe, a student at Fukushima University who interned in Houston during the summer and saw the impact the Astros’ World Series victory had on morale in the hurricane-stricken city. “It’s a very big chance for Fukushima to change the prospects.”

While teams like the Hopes and Firebonds are still relatively new, their players have already seen how sports can be helpful in Fukushima’s recovery.

Deon Jones, who played college basketball at Monmouth University, is in his first year with the Firebonds. His mother initially worried about his living in Fukushima, but he has enjoyed playing here, learning about the backgrounds and hardships of local teammates like point guard Igari and Shota Kanno, who is from the nearby city of Nihonmatsu. Several times a week, players hold clinics at local schools. A team spokeswoman said Firebonds home games draw about 2,000 fans.

“You’re playing for a little bit more than basketball,” Jones said. “You’re playing for everyone in Fukushima.”

And then there’s baseball, Japan’s national pastime. After Tokyo was awarded the 2020 Olympics, a strong push was made to reintroduce baseball specifically for those Games because of its history and popularity among young people in Japan. Participation has fallen in Fukushima since the 2011 tsunami. Atsushi Kobari, director of the Fukushima High School Baseball Federation, has tracked the declining enrollment of high school players over the last six years.

“It’s definitely due to the disaster at the nuclear plant,” Kobari said.

Miwako Kurikama, whose son Ryota plays baseball for Fukushima Commercial High School, was evacuated after the tsunami. Ryota’s elementary school permanently closed. At times, Kurikama drove 90 minutes away just to find fields where her son could practice.

On a recent Sunday morning, Kurikama watched him in a scrimmage with his high school teammates at Shinobugaoka Baseball Stadium in Fukushima. She was joined by six other mothers sitting behind home plate. They shared snacks and kept score on a chalkboard, laughing and cheering in unison during rundowns or run-scoring hits.

Kurikama has known some of the players since first grade, before her son’s school closed. Having them all together again seemed cathartic, familial.

Nearby at the baseball stadium, Little Leaguers from Fukushima were playing on the same field in Azuma Park that Olympians will patrol in 2 1/2 years. At Matsukawaundo Koen Ya Baseball Field, a children’s

tournament was invigorated by a soundtrack of banging plastic megaphones, resembling a Japanese professional game.

As normal as these scenes may have felt for some residents, the specter from the 2011 disaster remained. In a fenced-off area in Azuma Park, hundreds of giant black trash bags filled with decontaminated waste were being stored, stacked above eye level and still not yet properly discarded. The city government is working with Japan's environment ministry to remove them before the Olympics, but for now the area, which was big enough to hold another baseball field, instead resembled a junkyard.

At the baseball fields around the city, as children ran down the first-base line or chased down fly balls in right field, they passed by ominous signs posting the day's radiation levels--tallies with more serious implications than the runs on the scoreboard.

Although sports are helping some in Fukushima heal, they have not erased all doubts about the future--and perhaps they shouldn't be expected to.

"The government needs to inform us of actual information with scientific proof," said Michiaki Kakudate, who was watching his son, Keigo, 11, pitch at the children's tournament. "They say it's no problem, but that doesn't convince people."

Coming of Age Day ceremony held in Namie

January 8, 2018

Town holds first ceremony for new adults since nuclear disaster

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201801080018.html>

By YUKI CHAI/ Staff Writer

NAMIE, Fukushima Prefecture--A Coming-of-Age Day ceremony was held here Jan. 7 for the first time since the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant forced the evacuation of the entire town. About 110 of Namie's 183 "new adults," who have turned or will turn 20 years old this fiscal year, attended the ceremony about 8.5 kilometers north of Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s stricken nuclear plant. They were in their first year of junior high school when the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the nuclear disaster almost six years and 10 months ago, forcing around 21,000 residents in Namie to evacuate.

The tsunami killed 181 people in the town, including a boy and a girl who would have been new adults this fiscal year.

During the ceremony, many smiling acquaintances were reunited for the first time since the disaster.

"I did not think it was possible to have the Coming-of-Age Day ceremony in the town," said Yutaka Matsumoto, 20, a university student who lives in Sendai. "Seeing my old friends brought back a lot of memories."

Although the evacuation order was lifted for almost all affected areas of Namie at the end of March 2017, only 440 people had returned to their home by autumn. The majority of the town's new adults live outside Namie.

Koki Yamamoto, 19, a university student who currently lives in Saitama Prefecture, focused on positive elements during his speech at the ceremony.

"We feel that we have a bond that is stronger than before," Yamamoto said. "Hearing some good news about the town will provide emotional support."

Using Fukushima sake to push for recovery

January 10, 2018

Fukushima's premium sake wins worldwide acclaim, as brewers eye global markets in prefecture's push for recovery

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/01/10/national/fukushimas-premium-sake-wins-worldwide-acclaim-brewers-eye-global-markets-prefectures-push-recovery/#.WIXhwXkiGos>

by Masahiro Hidaka and Yuko Takeo
Bloomberg

In an area of Japan still decimated by nuclear disaster, sake is offering cause for hope.

For the past five years the sake brewers of Fukushima — on a two-decade quest to develop premium products — have captured the most gold medals in a key national competition, and have won numerous international awards. Drinkers worldwide have noticed the rising quality, and sake exports from Fukushima have more than doubled since 2012.

Now the prefectural government and local brewers are promoting their success. The hope is that Fukushima's champion sake — made from local rice and water — will serve as a symbol of the safety of local agricultural and fishery products and of prospects for the prefecture's broader revival.

"If we can show that Fukushima makes the best sake in the world, surely we can overcome the stigma," said Hiroyuki Karahashi, the president of Homare Sake Brewery Co., which won first place in the sake category at the 2015 London International Wine Challenge.

Fukushima's challenge is enormous. The earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdowns that devastated the region in March 2011 killed 4,000 people in Fukushima alone. Many of the 50,000 people forced to leave their homes have no plans to return. The local economy has been largely propped up by reconstruction spending in the years since, but that spending is expected to fall in the years to come.

Meanwhile, local companies still struggle with lingering public fears of radiation contamination. Only around 30 percent of businesses in the important fisheries and food processing sectors have seen their sales rise to pre-disaster levels, according to the nation's reconstruction agency.

All agricultural products from Fukushima — including every bag of rice — are tested for radiation using internationally accepted standards before shipment. Since 2015, no rice has registered radiation above the safety level, NHK has reported.

Still, 55 countries have some kind of restriction or requirement for additional documentation on imports of Fukushima products, according to the Foreign Ministry.

Takahiro Ichimura, a director of trade promotion at the Fukushima Prefectural Government who's spearheading the sake promotion efforts, said the importance of the ingredients in sake should help change people's perception of Fukushima.

"Water and rice are crucial," he said. "Once Fukushima's sake gains broader recognition and more people drink it, we think that overall appreciation for Fukushima should also increase."

The surge in sake exports follows a plunge in consumption in Japan — by half over the past 20 years — as consumers broadened their tastes.

Fukushima is trying to increase sales in the U.S. and Europe, including with promotional tours, Ichimura said. It has allocated ¥100 million (\$880,000) this fiscal year to promote local sake at events in major cities in Japan and abroad, as well as at trade shows and promotional websites, in a campaign run by a private public relations agency. It plans to increase the budget 10 percent next year.

One event near Shinbashi Station, a Tokyo business area teeming with salarymen, drew 30,000 people this year — up from 20,000 last year, according to the prefecture.

Behind the brewers' recent success lies a shift in strategy toward premium products. Twenty years ago many of Fukushima's breweries produced cheap sake that included distilled alcohol, earning them a poor reputation in Japan's northeast, which is historically a major sake-producing region.

The prefectural sake academy, established in 1992, changed the game. The various breweries' heirs came together there to pool their secret brewing techniques, raising the bar for the entire prefecture. At one three-century old brewery the focus is now on using organic rice, while at another an older, more time-consuming technique to create yeast mash — a key ingredient — is being revived to improve flavor.

To be sure, changing Fukushima's image will be a struggle. While Japan's latest national budget included billions of yen for the purpose, 13 percent of Japanese respondents to a recent survey said they would hesitate before buying produce from Fukushima due to worries about radiation.

Ichimura remains optimistic.

"Fukushima's sake is a symbol of its recovery. It's managed to achieve results despite the odds," he said. "My hope is that people will see this, and see how Fukushima is moving forward."

Large-scale dairy farming to revive Fukushima?

January 14, 2018

Fukushima dairy farmers look to large-scale 'reconstruction farms' to revive battered industry

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/01/14/national/fukushima-dairy-farmers-look-large-scale-reconstruction-farms-revive-battered-industry/#.WluUO3kiGos>

Fukushima Minpo

Dairy farmers in Fukushima Prefecture plan to build what they call "reconstruction farms" by fiscal 2020 as part of efforts to boost the industry in the areas tainted by the 2011 nuclear disaster.

The Fukushima Dairy Farmers' Cooperative, their industry body, is eyeing three locations for the new farms — Minamisoma's Odaka Ward, the town of Kawamata's Yamakiya district and the village of Iitate — which residents were forced to flee after the triple core meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant.

The envisaged farms would host a combined 1,600 cows for milk production and also host a research and development hub for cutting-edge biotechnology, according to people familiar with the plan.

The introduction of milking robots for mass production is one of the key features of the plan. The dairy farmers will also tie up with Zenrakuren, the industry's nationwide body, to improve R&D, the people said. Under the plan, Minamisoma would raise some 1,000 cows, Kawamata would take care of 200 to 300 and Iitate 350. The Minamisoma site would become a mass distribution center with a cold storage facility for produced milk.

Other facilities to be built for the farms include a production center for nutrient-rich cattle feed and a research center for fertilized eggs. They will work toward producing high-quality breeds — not only milk cows but also wagyu.

The people familiar with the plan emphasized the benefits of scale that would result by combining the operations of each dairy farmer and minimizing the running costs. That would help stabilize their business, they said.

Last year, cattle feed production facilities started up in Minamisoma and Kawamata, with another in Iitate soon to follow suit to supply the new farms, they said.

Cooperation with academic circles is also within the scope of the new project. Fukushima University will offer a new course on related studies from April 2019, and the dairy farmers hope that cooperating with the university will help foster a new generation of human resources for the industry.

Minamisoma plans to build lodgings for students and researchers, including those from Fukushima University and other institutions from across the country. Dairy farmers who want to experiment with new business methods would also be welcome.

The cost of building the farms is estimated at around ¥12 billion. The Fukushima Prefectural Government is negotiating with the municipalities involved in the project and plans to make use of a central government subsidy for reconstruction projects.

According to the Fukushima Dairy Farmers' Cooperative, large-scale farming is seen as the key to the industry's future as the population grays, leaving farms with a lack of successors.

Within Fukushima, milk producers are aging fast, and slashing production costs is the top priority. Even if there are young dairy farmers with aspirations, there aren't enough opportunities for them to start up, the cooperative said.

It also hopes that running large-scale farms with cutting-edge R&D functions would give consumers peace of mind about product safety by accurately grasping data related to radiation in milk and pasture grass. In 2015, the Fukushima cooperative launched the prototype for a large-scale support base for local farmers in the city of Fukushima. But Minoru Munakata, the head of the cooperative, said the business environment remains harsh.

"We hope running mass-scale farms will lead to cutting costs. We will work to make it a success," he said. *This section features topics and issues covered by the Fukushima Minpo, the largest newspaper in Fukushima Prefecture. The original article was published on Jan. 5.*

[Return to Futaba by 2022](#)



See this recent article on the blog: <http://www.fukushima-is-still-news.com/2017/12/radiation-cleanup-in-futaba.html>

Geplante Wiederbesiedlung von Futaba nach Fukushima

12.01.2018

<https://www.ippnw.de/atomenergie/artikel/de/geplante-wiederbesiedlung-von-futaba.html>

Im Frühjahr 2022 soll die unmittelbar neben der Atomruine von Fukushima Daiichi gelegene japanische Gemeinde Futaba wiederbesiedelt werden. Die rund 6000 Einwohner von Futaba waren am 11. März 2011, nur wenige Stunden nach Beginn der Atomkatastrophe vollständig evakuiert worden. Im Dezember 2017 begannen die Arbeiten zur Dekontaminierung der radioaktiv verstrahlten Gemeinde, meldete die Nachrichtenagentur Kyodo.

In den vergangenen Jahren wurde in einer beispiellosen Säuberungsaktion versucht, die Region um Fukushima zu dekontaminieren. Vereinzelt wurden die Evakuierungsverfügungen wieder aufgehoben. Futaba ist aber immer noch eine Geisterstadt, 96 Prozent des Gebietes sind als Zone ausgewiesen, in die eine „Rückkehr schwierig“ sei.

Gegenwärtig gibt es noch in sieben Orten in der Provinz Fukushima solche Zonen, schreibt das Handelsblatt. „In Futaba jedoch wurden rund 555 Hektar, das sind rund 11 Prozent des Stadtgebietes, zur Sonder-Wiederaufbauzone erklärt.“ Hier soll nun der Boden dekontaminiert werden. Gebäude, die in den

vergangenen Jahren langsam verfielen und unbewohnbar geworden sind, sollen abgerissen werden. Es ist unklar, wie viele der früheren Bewohner bereit sein werden, in ihren Heimatort zurückzukehren. Futaba zählt zu den am stärksten kontaminierten Gebieten in der Präfektur Fukushima. Waldbrände und Überschwemmungen können immer wieder zu Rekontaminierungen führen. In der Gemeinde werden größere Mengen radioaktiven Mülls gelagert wird. 2012 hatte der Bürgermeister, Katsutaka Idogawa, darum gebeten, dass sich die evakuierte Bevölkerung der Gemeinde irgendwo anders auf der Erde niederlassen dürfe.

See also in English:

- Forest fires threaten homes, still spreading in Iwate“. The Asahi Shimbun, 09.05.17.
www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201705090050.html
- „Wildfire rages in highly radioactive Fukushima mountain forest“. The Mainichi, 01.05.17.
www.mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170501/p2a/00m/ona/003000c
- Nuwer R. "Forests Around Chernobyl Aren't Decaying Properly". Smithsonian.Com, 14.03.14
<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/forests-around-chernobyl-arent-decaying-properly-180950075/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EqseXWOQLbE>
Japanese testify on radiation hazards at Human Rights Council in Geneva
<https://independentwho.org/en/2012/11/07/japanese-testify-in-geneva/>
7 - November - 2012



Katsutaka Idogawa (Mayor of Futaba) in front of WHO

An anti-nuclear city like Geneva, what a dream it must be for the Mayor of Futaba, a small Japanese town 3km from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station. Futaba was wiped out by the earthquake and tsunami of 11 March 2011. Because of the radioactivity the population will be unable to return for decades, if ever. The Mayor, Katsutaka Idogawa, came to Geneva at the end of October to testify at the UN Human Rights Council, along with Toshio Yanagihara, lead lawyer of the “Fukushima Collective Evacuation Trial”. Mayor Idogawa was received on 30 October by the Mayor of Geneva, Rémy Pagani, who expressed the sympathy and support of Geneva.

“Are there other mayors who have joined you to protest against the policy of the Japanese government that ignores the health problems of people who must live or even return to contaminated areas?” asked Geneva Mayor Rémy Pagani. “No, I’m the only one!” replied Mayor Idogawa. “How do you explain this?” the Geneva mayor asked. “Because the other mayors believe the lies of the authorities that minimize the danger. The authorities do not give the actual measurements of radioactivity. They have also multiplied by 20 the maximum doses recommended by specialized international organizations: 20 mSv per year in Japan and only 1 mSv in the rest of the world. We are guinea pigs.” Mr. Idogawa pointed out that, after Chernobyl, the Soviet authorities evacuated people from less polluted areas. “We know that the number of sick children currently in non-evacuated areas is estimated at 80% by local pediatricians.” The mayor is seeking support for efforts to put pressure on the Japanese government to have children evacuated to safe areas of the country.

At the Human Rights Council

After the warm reception at the Geneva City Hall, the Japanese delegation spoke at an information meeting at the UN Geneva headquarters. The meeting preceded the examination on 31 October of the human rights situation in Japan by the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) working group of the Human Rights Council. Mayor Idogawa said the human rights of the population are being violated by the lack of action and distorted information concerning radioactivity provided by the authorities. Immediately following the

nuclear accident, the Mayor and 300 residents were exposed to extremely high levels of radiation before they were finally evacuated thanks to his own initiatives. "I am the only mayor in contemporary Japan with personal experience of being covered with nuclear ash," he said. Mayor Idogawa provided detailed information, illustrated with tables and maps, on the situation of radioactivity throughout Fukushima prefecture, information that the authorities refuse to provide to the population. In his turn, lawyer Toshio Yanagihara spoke about the "Fukushima Collective Evacuation Trial." Through this class action suit on behalf of 14 children, the plaintiffs hope to force the authorities to recognize the legal right of hundreds of thousands of children to be evacuated from the contaminated areas. The fact that children are obliged to eat contaminated food and breathe radioactive air is a violation of the rights of the child. The press is either gagged or passes on false information provided by the government, which is a violation of the right to freedom of expression and information.

The Right of evacuation for children at risk

The Mayor and the lawyer urged the Human Rights Council to make recommendations to the Japanese government to give priority to the health of the population, especially the children. Mr Yanagihara pointed out that the government applies the lessons learned from Chernobyl to avoid the costs of compensation and not to interfere with the nuclear industry: increasing maximum tolerable radiation doses, covering up the diseases already apparent, systematically refusing to take into account the effects of internal radiation, and not establishing statistical control information ...

Official misinformation

Lawyer Toshio Yanagihara showed photographs of the new metering equipment installed by the authorities: the machines display 40% less radioactivity than those set to international standards. A young Japanese student, Takafumi Honda, representing the "World network for saving the children from radiation," read children's letters, including one from a girl from the region of Fukushima who is worried and asks if she will be able to have children and if they will be normal.

Dr. Michel Fernex, professor emeritus of the University of Basel (Switzerland) and member of IndependentWHO, who recently visited Japan, spoke of birth defects that occur after ingestion or exposure to radioactivity: the genome is attacked and anomalies appear. These anomalies are transmitted to subsequent generations. Around Fukushima, there is already an increase in miscarriages and perinatal mortality, low weight in new-born babies, children with abnormalities of the thyroid gland, sudden death. Cancers appear later, he said. It is imperative that children and pregnant women be evacuated and that healthy food is available to all residents.

Outside WHO for more than five years ...

The Japanese also visited those who maintain the 'Hippocratic vigil' of the group "IndependentWHO", activists who stand every weekday opposite the WHO's Geneva headquarters and have been doing so for more than five years, demanding that WHO fulfil its mandate to ensure the highest possible level of health for the world's population. WHO no longer has a department that deals with the effect of radiation on health: it has abdicated its responsibility and endorses the policies of the nuclear lobby, which is itself supported by the nuclear powers.

Airborne radiation still much higher than official maximum

January 18, 2018

Airborne radiation near Fukushima nuke plant still far higher than gov't max

https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180118/p2a/00m/0na/020000c#cxrecs_s

Airborne radiation in "difficult to return" zones around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant was as high as around 8.48 microsieverts per hour as of summer last year, according to data presented by the government nuclear watchdog on Jan. 17.

- **【Related】** Excessive radiation detected in vehicles removed from Fukushima nuke plant
- **【Related】** Radiation in Fukushima reactor containment vessel at deadly level: TEPCO
- **【Related】** Fukushima Police Perspective: Fighting against radiation (Pt. 6)

The Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) released the results of the July-September 2017 measurements at a regular meeting on the day. The highest reading was taken in Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture -- one of the municipalities hosting the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

Following the March 2011 triple meltdown, the government set a long-term radiation exposure limit of 1 millisievert per year, which breaks down to an hourly airborne radiation dose of 0.23 microsieverts.

The NRA took airborne radiation readings in the Fukushima Prefecture towns of Futaba, Okuma, Namie and Tomioka, and the village of Katsurao. The highest reading registered in the previous year's survey was 8.89 microsieverts per hour, in Katsurao.

Some of the NRA members at the Jan. 17 meeting pointed to study results showing that human exposure doses are relatively small compared to airborne doses. Regarding the calculation that an annual dose of 1 millisievert is equivalent to hourly exposure of 0.23 microsieverts, NRA Chairman Toyoshi Fuketa stated, "That was decided right at the start of the nuclear disaster, so it can't be helped that it's a cautious number." He added, "If we don't revise (that calculation) properly, it could hinder evacuees' return home."

What is the GAP standard?

January 19, 2018

Fukushima to scale back rice radiation checks

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/01/19/business/fukushima-scale-back-rice-radiation-checks/#.WmMGSHkiGos>

JJI

FUKUSHIMA – Fukushima Prefectural Government plans to scale back radiation checks on rice harvested in the prefecture, officials said Thursday.

The prefectural government is considering switching to sample tests, from blanket checks on all bags, within a few years for rice produced in areas not close to Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, the officials said.

But some farmers have sought to keep the full checks in place. The prefectural government aims to make a final decision by the end of March.

Blanket radiation checks began in 2012 following the triple meltdown at the nuclear plant in March 2011. From the 2012 harvest 71 bags of rice had levels of radiation that exceeded the safety limit, which is set at 100 becquerels per kilogram.

But the number has since declined, and no such bags were found between 2015 and 2017. Taking the results into consideration, the prefectural government has been reviewing the test method to reduce costs and manpower.

December 24, 2018

Fukushima farmers looking for authoritative ways to shed nuclear stigma

https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/12/24/national/fukushima-farmers-looking-authoritative-ways-shed-nuclear-stigma/#.Wmn-C4hG1_8

Fukushima Minpo

In light of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear crisis, the Fukushima Prefectural Government is hoping to find a new, faster and easier way to certify the safety of homegrown rice to ease the burden on local farmers.

The blanket radiation-screening method used in Fukushima is not known for being quick and efficient, yet the government and farmers are stuck with it for the time being until an alternative that is equally assuring to consumers can be found.

Struggling to counter misinformation about locally grown produce stemming from the core meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in 2011, farmers are looking to the globally recognized Good Agricultural Practice system, a third-party standard that certifies adherence to the standards recommended by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. The farmers hope GAP can help convince consumers that their products are safe, and holders of GAP certification are rising nationwide.

In addition to the GAP auditing system, there is a Japanese version dubbed “JGAP” recommended by the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Ministry to verify that farmers have recorded their production processes and had their products screened and certified by designated firms and groups. As of 2016, about 4,000 JGAP certificates had been issued.

In May, the Fukushima Prefectural Government vowed to make itself the prefecture with the most GAP certificates. As of Nov. 20, Fukushima had acquired 17 GAP and JGAP certificates. The prefecture plans to acquire more than 140 certificates by the 2020 Olympics.

Separately, Fukushima designed its own verification system (dubbed “FGAP”) to reflect its experience with the nuclear crisis. In addition to the list of items inspected under GAP, such as food safety and environmental protection, FGAP adds a category pertaining to countermeasures for radioactive substances.

FGAP calls for the management of rice paddy radiation levels and for voluntary radiation screenings before shipment. To promote this GAP variation, the Fukushima Prefectural Government plans to cover all expenses linked to the acquisition and renewal of FGAP certificates.

An official from the farm ministry’s Agricultural Production Bureau called GAP an “effective method to raise confidence” in food safety.

The Finance Ministry's Budget Bureau, which assesses cost allocations for the blanket screening method, said the two systems are "different in nature but looking in the same direction."

In 2012, the Fukushima Prefectural Government began screening all rice grown in the prefecture after excessive levels of radioactive cesium were detected in the previous year's crop.

The number of samples exceeding 100 becquerels per kilogram — the government's safety limit for the isotope — has dropped each year, and no samples tested since 2015 have been found over the limit.

Blanket screening costs an estimated ¥6 billion per year, and Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc, which runs the Fukushima No. 1 plant, shoulders at least ¥5 billion of that. The remainder is covered by state funds.

The prefecture's environmental protection and farm division said it is keen to speed up efforts to quell false rumors about rice contamination.

But gaining GAP certification is no small feat. For example, farmers have to clear a checklist of 209 items, though there are none pertaining to radiation measures.

JGAP, which has a checklist of 131 items, urges farmers to check the safety of their soil, water and fertilizer, in addition to their rice, via inspections or other means.

As for FGAP, 30 of its 97 categories deal with measures to address radioactive substances. Chuji Kuroe, a 61-year-old rice farmer in Kawamata, is hardly excited when it's time for the fall harvest.

Every year, Kuroe produces about 30 tons of rice. For the safety checks, he has to pack them into 30-kg bags for storage, which means about 1,000 bags each year. These bags are then inspected by a series of measuring instruments before shipment.

It is time-consuming to label every bag with a bar code for inspection, and carrying and preparing each one for analysis has taken a physical toll on Kuroe.

In addition, the lack of consumer and retailer awareness regarding certification frustrates many farmers.

"Despite all the trouble I went through, if the consumers do not know much about what GAP is, it will not lead to an understanding of the safety of agricultural products," said a 57-year-old farmer in southern Fukushima.

According to the nonprofit GAP Research Institute's survey covering about 1,000 people in Japan, 58 percent did not know what GAP is and 33 percent said they had only heard of the name. Only 9 percent said they knew what GAP was.

This section features topics and issues covered by the Fukushima Minpo, the largest newspaper in Fukushima Prefecture. The original article was published on Dec. 15.

Radiation checks to be scaled back

January 19, 2018

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<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/01/19/business/fukushima-scale-back-rice-radiation-checks/#.WmMGSHkiGos>

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Foods from Fukushima served at Davos Forum

January 25, 2018

Fukushima foods publicized at Davos Forum

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20180125_11/

An event showcasing Japanese food and culture was held at the Swiss resort town Davos, where the World Economic Forum is taking place.

People from Fukushima Prefecture served locally-produced foods to publicize the progress in recovery from the 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident that struck the northeastern prefecture.

Foods from Fukushima were served for the first time, along with sushi and tempura.

People at the Forum enjoyed Fukushima's local specialties, such as herring seasoned with Japanese pepper, and a traditional delicacy made with salmon.

The guests said they tasted very good. Some said they felt food from Fukushima was safe.

People also got a taste of sake produced in Fukushima and Hiroshima prefectures.

A Fukushima government official said he is happy that many visitors from around the world have shown interest in Fukushima.

He said he wants people to know that Fukushima has made steady recovery in the period of almost 7 years since the disaster.

Tout va bien

January 29, 2018

Work starts for industrial site near Daiichi plant

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20180129_01/

Work has begun near the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant to prepare an area for a new industrial site.

A ground-breaking ceremony was held on Sunday in **Futaba Town**, Fukushima Prefecture, where the disabled plant is located.

Speaking at Sunday's ceremony, Futaba Mayor Shiro Izawa said reconstruction work has finally started in the town.

He expressed hope that the site would facilitate the town's recovery and the decommissioning work of the reactors.

The town's first new industrial site since the accident will be built in its northeastern district.

The district's relatively low level of radioactive contamination is paving the way for the early resettlement of residents and the resumption of business activities.

All residents of the town were ordered to evacuate soon after a major earthquake and tsunami in 2011 that destroyed the plant's nuclear reactors.

The municipality has allocated about 50 hectares for the project. The aim is to make the district partially usable later this year.

Reconstruction Minister Masayoshi Yoshino said that along with this project, his ministry plans to decontaminate housing sites so that residents can return.

The municipal office says it intends to lease part of the industrial site to companies taking part in the decommissioning of the reactors.

The officials say they also plan to set up prefectural archives to preserve records of the 2011 disaster and nuclear accidents. They also plan to build an industrial exchange center where workers can hold meetings and have meals.

"Proper" location for radioactive waste?



Bags of debris contaminated with radiation are seen stored in a field in the town of Okuma, near the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, in this August 2015 photo. | KYODO

January 31, 2018

Government to test safety of burying radioactive soil this spring

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/01/31/national/government-test-safety-burying-radioactive-soil-spring/#.WnHNC3wiGos>

Kyodo

The government plans to conduct a demonstration project sometime this spring to test the safety of burying waste generated by decontamination work following the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, the Environment Ministry said Wednesday.

In the project, **soil waste from eastern and northeastern areas of the country other than Fukushima Prefecture will be covered with uncontaminated soil at sites in the village of Tokai, Ibaraki Prefecture, and the town of Nasu, Tochigi Prefecture, with radioactivity levels around the locations being measured.**

The government plans to determine its disposal policy for contaminated soil in the fall or later depending on the outcome of the experiment, according to the ministry.

A total of 56 municipalities in seven prefectures — Iwate, Miyagi, Ibaraki, Tochigi, Gunma, Saitama and Chiba — have completed cleanup work with financial support from the central government.

But **some 330,000 cubic meters of soil waste has been temporarily kept at around 28,000 locations — including public spaces such as schools and parks — in 53 municipalities,** prompting local residents to call for disposal of the waste at the earliest opportunity.

The project will be carried out on the premises of the Tokai Research and Development Center's Nuclear Science Research Institute in Tokai and at a public space in Nasu.

Some 2,500 cubic meters of soil waste temporarily kept at two locations in Tokai and about 350 cubic meters of soil waste kept at the public space in Nasu will be used in the project.

After the waste is buried, **workers' exposure levels to radiation will also be measured.**

"Households in storage locations continue shouldering the burden. I hope (the project) will prove the safety of burying it (soil waste) and lead to the disposal (of contaminated soil)," a Nasu town official said.

"It took time to conduct (the project) but it's good," said an official in Tokai, adding that more and more local residents have been asking for the removal of soil waste from a park.

After being asked by municipalities to demonstrate a way to dispose of soil waste, the ministry had been searching for proper locations to carry out the demonstration project.

Radioactive soil disposal method to be tested

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20180131_30/

Japan's Environment Ministry will carry out tests at 2 sites where soil generated in decontamination work following the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident is buried.

Outside Fukushima Prefecture, where the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant is located, some 330,000 cubic meters of soil are stored in 53 cities, towns and villages in 7 prefectures in eastern Japan.

The soil is currently kept at some 28,000 locations, including schoolyards and parks.

Local residents have called on the government to safely dispose of the soil as quickly as possible. The environment ministry will start testing soil disposal methods in the spring.

The sites chosen are a nuclear research institute in Ibaraki Prefecture and a sports ground in Tochigi Prefecture.

Ministry officials say the stored soil will be buried in the ground and then covered over again with clean new earth. They will then measure radiation levels at areas surrounding the sites and the amount of radiation that workers were exposed to.

The ministry will start negotiating with local governments regarding a full-scale disposal after verifying the test method's safety and drawing up an appropriate disposal plan.

TEPCO ordered by court to pay damages to plaintiffs

January 7, 2018

TEPCO ordered to pay 1.1 bil. yen in damages to Fukushima residents

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180207/p2g/00m/0dm/064000c>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- A court on Wednesday ordered Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc. to pay 1.1 billion yen (\$10.1 mil) in damages to Fukushima residents over nuclear meltdowns triggered by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

The **Tokyo District Court** ordered the operator of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant to pay the combined sum to 321 plaintiffs who had sought 11 billion yen in compensation, claiming they had suffered psychological damage from losing their livelihoods in the Odaka district of the city of Minamisoma.

Residents of the district, located within 20 kilometers of the power plant, were ordered to evacuate after the nuclear disaster until the order was partially lifted in July 2016.

While around 12,800 people lived in the district before the disaster, the population had dropped to about 2,400 as of December 2017, according to the city.

TEPCO said it will carefully review the ruling before deciding whether to accept it.

The company has already announced it will pay 8.5 million yen to each resident in the district under the state's guidelines.

But the plaintiffs in the latest suit said the amount was insufficient and sought an additional 32 million yen per person.

The magnitude-9.0 earthquake and ensuing tsunami struck northeastern Japan on March 11, 2011, resulting in a blackout at the plant and a consequent loss of reactor cooling functions. The plant suffered multiple meltdowns and hydrogen explosions.

TEPCO ordered by court to pay damages (2)

February 8, 2018

TEPCO ordered to pay 1.1 billion yen to evacuees in Fukushima

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201802080065.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Tokyo Electric Power Co. has been ordered to pay 3.3 million yen (\$30,000) each to 318 people who were forced to flee their hometown in Fukushima Prefecture after the 2011 nuclear disaster.

However, the plaintiffs are unhappy as they sought 10 times that amount.

“We are stripped of our hometown, livelihood and life, and Odaka will not return to what it used to be,”

76-year-old Isao Enei of Minami-Soma said at a news conference after the Feb. 7 verdict at Tokyo District Court. “I am sorry that the judges did not visit and see the situation of Odaka for themselves.”

The plaintiffs are now considering appealing as they had initially sought 33 million yen each in additional damages in the lawsuit.

“It is significant in a way in recognizing ‘damages for the loss of a hometown,’” said Junichiro Hironaka, the plaintiffs’ lead lawyer. “But the amount of compensation ordered does not correspond to the actual damages they suffered.”

In handing down the ruling, Presiding Judge Yuko Mizuno said that the plaintiffs’ “right to a stable life in a place that was the foundation of their livelihood had been breached.”

TEPCO said it will respond to the court decision after studying it in detail.

The plaintiffs lived in Minami-Soma’s Odaka district before the triple meltdown at TEPCO’s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011.

Odaka was located within the 20-kilometer no-entry zone surrounding the plant from which residents were forced to evacuate.

The plaintiffs contended that TEPCO was liable for causing psychological damage as they were displaced and lost their hometown.

The total that TEPCO must pay to the 318 plaintiffs falls a fraction short of 1.1 billion yen, but the court dismissed claims by three plaintiffs on the grounds that they lived overseas at the time of the accident or for other reasons.

The verdict was the fourth that has been handed down in regard to about 30 similar lawsuits that have been brought across the nation.

In the three other suits, the plaintiffs claimed in the district courts that the government and TEPCO had been negligent, but in the latest case the court was only concerned with the amount of compensation.

The plaintiffs argued for compensation for damages stemming from the evacuation, as well as compensation for a loss of various general benefits that they would have enjoyed if they had continued to reside in their hometown.

The power company rejected the plaintiffs' claim for additional compensation, citing the payment already made of 8.5 million yen per victim of the nuclear disaster in the district based on the government's "interim guidelines" for compensation.

It insisted that the plaintiffs' claim that "Odaka has been lost forever" was not proven.

The evacuation order was lifted for most of the district in July 2016.

But the court stated that even after it became possible for residents to return (to Odaka), it "constitutes a serious violation of the plaintiffs' life if the foundations of their livelihood were considerably changed."

TEPCO argued that the government's interim compensation guidelines were reasonable.

But the court rejected it, saying the district court will not be bound by the government's guidelines.

Rulings for similar lawsuits are expected in March at the Kyoto District Court and Tokyo District Court.

Foreign tourists back in Fukushima

Number of foreigners who stayed overnight in Fukushima Prefecture

Year	Number of lodging non-Japanese
2010	87,170
2011	23,990
2012	28,840
2013	31,300
2014	37,150
2015	48,090
2016	71,270
2017 (January through October)	78,680

February 14, 2018

Foreign lodgers in Fukushima return to pre-disaster level

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201802140001.html>

By HIROSHI ISHIZUKA/ Staff Writer

The Asahi Shimbun

The number of overnight guests in Fukushima Prefecture has recovered to pre-disaster levels, several years after the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and triple nuclear meltdown struck the region in 2011.

A survey by the Japan Tourism Agency showed as many non-Japanese tourists as before the disaster stayed in the prefecture in 2017, mainly because an increasing number of people from Taiwan and Thailand made it over last year.

A total of 78,680 visitors from outside Japan stayed the night in the prefecture between January and October last year, exceeding 77,890 for the same period in 2010, according to preliminary figures.

While the figure for 2010 rose to 87,000 when those who stayed in Fukushima Prefecture in November and December are included, the annual number for 2017 could surpass that for 2010.

An official of the tourism planning section of the tourism ministry's Tohoku District Transport Bureau said behind the growing number of guests to the region is the prefectural government's aggressive efforts to present tourist information to Thailand, Taiwan and Vietnam through Facebook and other social networking websites.

According to the prefecture's tourism and exchange division, those promotion programs, such as providing tourist information for spring in the winter and replying to e-mails from individuals who want to know how to visit certain sightseeing spots, were started in August 2016.

Such efforts have resulted in a rise in the number of visitors from Thailand and Taiwan, from which many individual travelers come to Japan, according to prefectural officials.

While the guest numbers for September rose from 3,580 in 2016 to 6,600 in 2017, most of the people who visited Fukushima Prefecture during the period were Thai and Taiwanese, the officials said.

The number of foreigners who stayed in the prefecture dropped by 70 percent in 2011, compared with a year earlier.

But the guest number for 2016 was only less than 20 percent lower than in 2010.

Reopening of J-Village

February 14, 2018

Japan's national J-Village soccer center in Fukushima to partially reopen in July

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/02/14/national/j-village-soccer-center-fukushima-partially-reopen-july/#.WoP4p3wiGos>

JJI

FUKUSHIMA – The J-Village national soccer training center in Fukushima Prefecture will partially reopen on July 28, more than seven years after the facility was forced to close due to the 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster that devastated parts of the Tohoku region, its operator said Tuesday.

After the reopening, six soccer grounds — five with natural grass and one with synthetic turf — will be available, as well as a lecture hall with a capacity for some 300 people. The number of rooms dedicated to housing athletes training at the facility will also increase to 200, about twice the pre-disaster level.

J-Village, located in the towns of Naraha and Hirono, was used by thousands of workers dealing with the reconstruction effort in the area and meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

"We'll make every effort to ensure that J-Village becomes a place that attracts many people with the power of sports once again and serves as a symbol of reconstruction in Fukushima," said Eiji Ueda, vice president of the facility's operator, Japan Football Village Co., at a news conference.

The training center is expected to fully reopen in the spring of 2019.

Fukushima rice: Drop blanket checks?

February 16, 2018

After 3 years of taint-free rice, Fukushima mulls review of checks

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201802160053.html>

By KENJI IZAWA/ Staff Writer

FUKUSHIMA--Authorities are weighing random checks instead of blanket radiation testing of rice grown in the prefecture as three years have passed without incident.

There has not been a single case during that time of tainted rice exceeding the national safety standard, officials explained.

Blanket checks were introduced in 2012 in response to the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant the year before and consumer concerns about food safety.

Harvested rice is checked bag by bag for certification before shipment. The safety threshold is set by the government at 100 becquerels per kilogram.

But some farmers' groups and other parties remain wary of a switch to random inspections due to lingering suspicions that rice from Fukushima Prefecture remains hazardous.

Since blanket checks began, prefectural officials have inspected 60 million or so bags of rice totaling 2.1 million tons. Not a single instance of tainted rice has emerged since 2015.

Given that exhaustive steps have been taken to reduce the absorption in crops of radioactive substances and that the inspection process places a burden on farmers and related parties, officials are trying to find the best timing to implement a review of the testing method.

Fukushima Prefecture announced plans in January to review the process, but for the time being will keep blanket checks in place.

Discussions are being held to introduce random inspections in as early as three years. A decision will be announced in fiscal 2018.

Authorities also plan a publicity blitz to put lingering safety concerns to rest about grain from Fukushima. Other agricultural products from the prefecture are subject to random testing.

Agricultural experts and others have no qualms about switching to random testing, but the Japan Agricultural Cooperative in Fukushima is calling for discussions to first elaborate on what random inspections will entail to help alleviate safety concerns and restore the reputation of rice grown in the prefecture.

In 2010, before the nuclear disaster unfolded, Fukushima Prefecture ranked fourth in terms of rice production with annual output at around 445,000 tons.

Even after the disaster, it has ranked within the top 10.

However, the wholesale price of Fukushima rice has not returned to pre-disaster levels in spite of the blanket inspections.

A survey by a consumer affairs group in the prefecture in 2017 found that 66.2 percent of 1,550 respondents favor continued blanket testing.

Although the figure was 6.9 points lower than a survey the previous year, it still shows that **food safety concerns remains a major issue.**

Cleanup to start soon in Namie

February 15, 2018

Japan to start nuclear cleanup of Fukushima town around May

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180215/p2g/00m/0dm/069000c>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Nuclear decontamination work using state funds will begin around May in Namie, a town in northeastern Japan hit hard by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, **to make some of its most-contaminated areas habitable again**, the government said Thursday.

The government is seeking to lift an evacuation order for three areas in the town, covering about 660 hectares, by March 2023.

The order currently covers about 80 percent of Namie in Fukushima Prefecture, and the areas to be decontaminated make up some 3.7 percent of it where entry is prohibited in principle.

On Dec. 22, the government approved a plan submitted by the town to rebuild the areas affected by meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

Similar rebuilding efforts have been underway in the neighboring town of Futaba since December and are also scheduled to begin in the town of Okuma in March.

For Namie, the first round of work covers some 30 hectares of land.

On March 11, 2011, a tsunami inundated the six-reactor plant located in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, and flooded the power supply facilities.

Reactor cooling systems were crippled and the Nos. 1 to 3 reactors suffered fuel meltdowns in the world's worst nuclear catastrophe since the 1986 Chernobyl disaster

Exporting Fukushima peaches

February 18, 2018

Fukushima fruit exports to Southeast Asia peachy as contamination fears dissipate

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/02/18/national/fukushima-fruit-exports-southeast-asia-peachy-contamination-fears-dissipate/#.WomJY3wiGos>

Fukushima Minpo

Among peaches Japan exported to Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia last year, those produced in Fukushima Prefecture led the way, retaining their No. 1 status for two years in a row.

According to the prefectural government, 48 tons of Fukushima peaches were shipped to the three countries in 2017, up 57 percent from the previous year, thanks to efforts by local producers and distributors to acquire new customers.

With bans from the Fukushima nuclear disaster still in place around Asia, however, Fukushima officials said they will continue calling on the central government to negotiate with biggest customers of Japanese peaches, Hong Kong and Taiwan, to encourage them to lift bans on produce from the prefecture.

According to data compiled by the prefectural government based on Finance Ministry trade statistics and transaction data from local farm co-ops, Thailand topped the list of Fukushima peaches importers for two

years in a row, with shipments in 2017 totaling 31.1 tons, or 1.5 times higher than the previous year. Fukushima peaches accounted for 94.8 percent of its peach imports from Japan.

Exports to Malaysia meanwhile reached 15 tons, making up 72.5 percent of its Japanese peach imports, while exports to Indonesia totaled 1.5 tons, or 51.7 percent of its Japanese peach imports. Both amounts more than doubled from a year ago.

In Thailand, the number of stores selling Fukushima peaches rose to 70 from roughly 50, mainly in Bangkok, after the prefectural government entrusted a local importer to take steps to bolster sales, such as by dispatching staff to the stores when the peaches are in season.

Fukushima Gov. Masao Uchibori visited Malaysia in August to promote the fruit, resulting in a deal to export 15 tons to the nation last year.

Produce other than peaches has been making headway in Southeast Asia as well, especially in nations with high economic development and relatively fewer negative rumors about Fukushima.

Fukushima exported 77 tons of rice to Malaysia in 2017, up from none a year before, and 16.3 tons of persimmons to Thailand.

To accelerate exports of local produce, the prefectural government will put together a new strategy before the end of March. It plans to analyze different preferences and consumers' purchasing power by nation and region and set target markets for each item.

It will then draw up measures to create production systems that meet the needs of those markets and find ways to promote the products.

"The efforts of people involved, including producers, farm co-ops and importers, have produced good results," an official with Fukushima's division for promoting local produce said. "We will continue working on developing effective sales channels to win the support of overseas consumers."

This section features topics and issues from Fukushima covered by the Fukushima Minpo, the largest newspaper in Fukushima Prefecture. It was previously called Fukushima File. The original article was published on Feb. 2.

TEPCO forced to pay damages for old man's suicide

February 21, 2018

TEPCO ordered to pay damages over centenarian's suicide after nuclear disaster

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180221/p2a/00m/0na/006000c>

FUKUSHIMA -- Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) must pay compensation over the suicide of a centenarian who took his own life shortly before he was to be forcibly evacuated from his hometown due to the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011, a local court has ruled.

- **【Related】** TEPCO ordered to pay 1.1 bil. yen in damages to Fukushima residents
- **【Related】** Voluntary evacuees win compensation over Fukushima nuclear disaster
- **【Related】** Daughter sues TEPCO over father's death from kidney disease after 3.11 disaster

The Fukushima District Court ordered the power company on Feb. 20 to pay 15.2 million yen in damages to the bereaved family of Fumio Okubo from the Fukushima Prefecture village of Iitate, who died at the age of 102.

In the ruling, the court recognized the causal relationship between the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant and Okubo's suicide.

"An unbearable mental burden caused by the nuclear accident had a huge impact on the victim's decision to take his own life," Presiding Judge Hideki Kanazawa said as he handed down the ruling.

TEPCO's public relations division commented that the company "will sincerely respond to the case after closely examining the ruling."

According to the legal team for the plaintiffs, this is the third court case in which TEPCO has been held responsible over the suicide of an evacuee from a region affected by the nuclear crisis.

According to the ruling, Okubo was born and raised in Iitate. In his post-retirement life, he had enjoyed strolling in his neighborhood and chatting with friends while drinking tea, until the area was hit by the nuclear disaster triggered by the March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and ensuing tsunami.

Okubo hanged himself at his home on the morning of April 12, the day after he learned from a TV news program that Iitate, which is located some 30 to 50 kilometers northwest of the power station, was designated as an evacuation zone.

In the trial, the plaintiffs demanded 60.5 million yen in compensation, claiming that the evacuation forced Okubo to take his own life. "He had all his friends and assets as well as motivation in life in the village, and the only cause of his suicide we can think of is the forced evacuation due to the nuclear accident," a representative of the bereaved family said in the trial.

TEPCO argued that the causal relationship between the disaster and Okubo's suicide remained unclear. Presiding Judge Kanazawa recognized that Okubo's mental anguish caused by his loss of village life, which he had continued for more than 100 years, and a lack of prospect for returning home ultimately triggered his suicide.

At the same time, the presiding judge deemed that Okubo's will to avoid burdening his family after evacuation also contributed to his decision to take his own life, and determined that the ratio of TEPCO's responsibility for the centenarian's suicide was 60 percent.

Mieko Okubo, 65, the wife of Okubo's second son, expressed appreciation for the ruling.

"I finally can say to my father-in-law, 'Please rest in peace,'" she said.

Okubo worked until he was nearly 80 and never lived outside Iitate. He sang his favorite song "Sumo Jinku," which is performed during sumo wrestlers' regional tours, in front of nearly 100 villagers who gathered at a party to celebrate his 99th birthday. He was also looking forward to visits by his grandchildren.

Mieko, who married Okubo's second son more than 40 years ago, was Okubo's main conversation partner during the day because her husband was often away from home for work.

Whenever she jokingly told him, "I feel as if I married you," he often laughed.

However, the nuclear disaster deprived the Okubo family of the peaceful life they had enjoyed. When Okubo saw a TV program reporting that an evacuation order would be shortly issued to the village, Okubo said, "I don't want to leave this village. I've lived too long."

He did not eat dinner that night, even though his favorite boiled dish was served. The following morning, Mieko went to Okubo's room to notify him that breakfast was ready, only to find that he had hanged himself.

"The village was everything for him. Ordering him to leave Iitate was tantamount to telling him to die," Mieko said.

Mieko and other members of Okubo's family launched the damages suit in July 2015 in a bid to have TEPCO admit to its responsibility for his suicide. While some people criticized the family over their legal action, the family received nearly 100 letters of encouragement from all over Japan.

The family members, who are now taking shelter at an apartment in Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, intend to return to their home in Iitate by the end of this year.

Mieko and her family hope that TEPCO will acknowledge its responsibility for Okubo's suicide and apologize. "I'd like TEPCO officials to offer an incense stick" for the soul of Okubo, Mieko said.

February 20, 2018

TEPCO ordered to pay damages for 102-year-old man's suicide

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201802200039.html>

FUKUSHIMA--A court here acknowledged that a 102-year-old man took his life rather than endure forced evacuation due to the 2011 nuclear disaster and ordered plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. to pay 15.2 million (\$142,300) in damages to his family.

The Fukushima District Court said in its Feb. 20 ruling that the planned mandatory evacuation of Iitate was behind Fumio Okubo's suicide, adding that the prospect of being forced from his home must have triggered "unbearable psychological strain."

According to the plaintiffs' legal team, the ruling was the third by a court recognizing a link between the 2011 triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant and the suicide of an individual affected by the disaster.

Okubo, a resident of Iitate, killed himself after watching TV news on the evening of April 11, 2011, a month after the accident unfolded. The program reported that the government would designate Iitate as a zone that should prepare to evacuate.

He was found dead in his room the following morning.

In the lawsuit, filed in July 2015, Mieko Okubo, his daughter-in-law, and two other plaintiffs contended that Okubo had no other reason to take his life except that the planned evacuation weighed heavily on him.

TEPCO maintained in court that Okubo suffered from health problems prior to the nuclear disaster and that the correlation between his death and the disaster was slim, even if it did indeed exist.

The plaintiffs had sought 60.5 million yen in compensation.

TEPCO ordered to pay \$142,000 in damages

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20180220_26/

A Japanese court has ordered Tokyo Electric Power Company to pay about 142,000 dollars in damages to the family of an elderly man who killed himself amid an evacuation order during the 2011 Fukushima nuclear crisis.

After an earthquake and tsunami struck northeastern Japan on March 11, 2011, the Fukushima Daiichi plant experienced nuclear meltdowns. The village of Iitate, where the man lived, was subsequently designated an evacuation zone.

One day after learning that he would have to leave his lifelong home, 102-year-old Fumio Okubo committed suicide.

Members of his family filed a lawsuit demanding that the utility pay a total of 568,000 dollars in damages.

They said Okubo killed himself in the face of an order to evacuate amid the nuclear crisis.

At issue in court was a causal relationship between the suicide and the nuclear disaster.

In the ruling on Tuesday, presiding judge Hideki Kanazawa at the Fukushima District Court said Okubo had lived in the village his entire life and suffered unbearable pain over the evacuation order as he felt he would likely die before he could return home.

After the ruling was handed down, Mieko Okubo, the wife of Fumio Okubo's son, said she feels her father-in-law's wishes have been heard. She said she hope he will now rest in peace, adding that TEPCO should offer sticks of incense for him.

Not all evacuees want to go home

February 21, 2018

Japan wants Fukushima evacuees to go home. They're not so sure.

<https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-Pacific/2018/0221/Japan-wants-Fukushima-evacuees-to-go-home.-They-re-not-so-sure>

About 160,000 people left their homes in 2011, after an earthquake and tsunami triggered the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl. Today, the government says it's safe for many to return. But regaining residents' trust remains a challenge.

February 21, 2018 Yonezawa, Japan—For Toru Takeda, the best and worst parts of life in Yonezawa are the same: snow. Located in the mountains 150 miles north of Tokyo, the city typically lies under a few feet every winter. It snows so much that many streets in Yonezawa are equipped with sprinklers that spray warm underground water to keep them clear.

Mr. Takeda is still getting used to the sheer amount of snow and the inconveniences that come with it. Train delays. Slow traffic. Shoveling. It doesn't snow nearly as much in Fukushima City, his hometown, an hour-long drive away in good weather.

But snow has its benefits when it melts. "The soil here is rich because the snow melts slowly," Takeda says one morning at a diner in downtown Yonezawa. He's certain that the gradual thaw makes the fruits and vegetables grown in the region some of the best in Japan. Taking a sip of coffee, he adds solemnly, "The water and soil in Fukushima [Prefecture] is still contaminated."

It's been almost seven years since the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami struck the northeast coast of Japan and triggered a meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, the world's worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl. The cleanup is projected to cost \$200 billion and take up to 40 years. Yet already many of the area's 160,000 evacuees have started to return.

The Japanese government says it's safe, but Takeda isn't convinced. His faith in authority was shattered by the botched response to the meltdown. Today, he remains suspicious of everything from regulatory agencies to utility companies, to say nothing of food safety and, of course, nuclear power. Whether the

government is able to regain Takeda's trust – and the trust of thousands of others like him – is an important test of its ability to revive the cities and towns of Fukushima.

“We don't believe the government anymore,” Takeda says, speaking for himself, his wife and daughter, and about 20 other evacuees he knows who have refused to leave Yonezawa. “I'll do anything and everything I can to make sure we can stay,” he declares. That includes going to court.

Man on a mission

It all started last March, when the Fukushima prefectural government ended unconditional housing subsidies to nearly 27,000 people who left areas not designated as mandatory evacuation zones – including Takeda and many others in Yonezawa. Faced with the choice of returning to areas they fear are still unsafe or paying rent many can't afford, they've chosen neither. Instead, they've stayed in their apartments and refused to pay rent. The local public housing agency tolerated this for a while. Then, in September, it filed an eviction lawsuit against the so-called voluntary evacuees, who quickly hired a team of lawyers in response.

“The Japanese government and Tepco caused the disaster,” Takeda says, referring to Tokyo Electric Power Company, the operator of the Fukushima Daiichi plant. “They should have to pay.”

Since moving to Yonezawa in April 2011, Takeda, a 77-year-old retired high school English teacher, has emerged as the de facto leader of the city's evacuee community. He organizes social gatherings and frequently meets with local government officials. He and his wife even set up a learning center in their small, three-room apartment for evacuee children. The center closed after two years, and now Takeda spends most of his time on the lawsuit. He does everything from fundraising to meeting with lawyers.

“The government hates me,” he says. “If not for me then the evacuees would have already gone back.”

While the lawsuit in Yonezawa continues, some victims have already found redress. In October, a district court in Fukushima ruled that the Japanese government and Tepco must pay damages totaling \$4.4 million to about 2,900 people. It was the third case in which a court found the company negligent in not preventing the meltdown.

'It breeds distrust'

Yonezawa, which lies 60 miles northwest of the Fukushima Daiichi plant, was once home to as many as 3,900 evacuees from Fukushima. There are fewer than 500 now left, according to government figures. Some have returned home, either out of financial necessity or because they believe it's safe, but many have refused. In a survey conducted last April by the Fukushima government, 80 percent of voluntary evacuees living in other parts of Japan said they had no intention of going back.

The government has worked hard to assuage any lingering fears. But Shaun Burnie, a senior nuclear specialist at Greenpeace, says officials have played down the potential health risks because of the pressure they feel to put a positive spin on the situation. With the 2020 Tokyo Olympics approaching, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe wants to deliver on his promise that the Fukushima cleanup effort is “under control.” “Having zones where people can't live is politically unacceptable for the government,” Mr. Burnie says. “It creates the impression that a nuclear disaster can destroy whole communities for a long time.”

As the government rushes to revitalize Fukushima, it may run the risk of deepening public distrust, diminishing the respect for authority that is deeply rooted in Japanese society. A 2017 Pew survey found that 57 percent of Japanese have at least some trust in the national government to act in the country's best interests, though just 6 percent have a lot of trust in national leaders.

Timothy Jorgenson, an associate professor of radiation medicine at Georgetown University, wrote in a 2016 online commentary that one of the government's mistakes was its decision to increase the maximum limit of radiation exposure from 1 microsievert to 20 microsieverts per year. (Microsieverts measure the effects of low-level radiation.)

“To the Japanese people, this raising of the annual safety limit from one to 20 mSv appears like the government is backpedaling on its commitment to safety,” Dr. Jorgenson wrote. “This is the problem with moving regulatory dose limits after the fact to accommodate inconvenient circumstances; it breeds distrust.”

Jorgenson wrote that the government would be better off to just explain what the health risks are at various radiation doses and leave it at that. Armed with such information, evacuees could decide for themselves if they want to return home.

For now, the government appears poised to further cut housing subsidies to evacuees. Its current plan would remove 5,000 households from the roll by March 2019. Advocacy groups are pressuring it to reconsider. In a written statement submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Council on Feb. 2, Greenpeace and Human Rights Now, a Tokyo-based nongovernmental organization, called on the government to “provide necessary housing support to all Fukushima evacuees, including those who evacuated from outside the government designated areas, as long as needed to ensure their ability to freely choose where they will live without pressure to return areas where their health or life would be at risk.”

If the Japanese government were to take such advice, the lawsuit in Yonezawa could end. Takeda says it’s a tempting thought, but rather than waiting for the government to change its plan, he’s busy preparing for his next court appearance on March 20.

Top of Form

Bottom of Form

“I don’t have much time left,” Takeda says. “I can’t go home.”

Takehiko Kambayashi contributed to this report.

Newly reopened schools will remain empty

February 28, 2018

Only 4% of kids in 4 disaster-hit Fukushima Pref. areas will attend reopened local schools

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180228/p2a/00m/0na/014000c>

FUKUSHIMA -- Only about 4 percent of schoolchildren in four Fukushima Prefecture municipalities affected by the 2011 nuclear disaster will attend local schools that are set to be reopened this coming April, the Mainichi Shimbun has learned.

- **【Related】** TEPCO ordered to pay damages over centenarian's suicide after nuclear disaster
- **【Related】** Japan to start nuclear cleanup of Fukushima town around May
- **【Related】** Voluntary evacuees win compensation over Fukushima nuclear disaster

This is largely because many schoolchildren's families that evacuated to other regions have not returned to their hometowns as they have settled down in areas where they took shelter due to prolonged evacuation.

Following the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear crisis in March 2011, the national government issued evacuation orders in 11 municipalities in the prefecture. In nine of these municipalities, excluding the towns of Okuma and Futaba hosting the nuclear plant, the government had partially lifted evacuation

orders by spring last year, stating that radiation levels had sufficiently declined and appropriate infrastructure had been built.

These municipalities began efforts to redevelop their communities by attracting new industries such as the decommissioning of the crippled nuclear reactors and renewable energy. However, only a small number of households, particularly those families with young children, have returned home. The occupancy rate of homes in areas where evacuation orders have been lifted is less than 20 percent and about half of those who are currently living in these municipalities are elderly people.

The four municipalities -- the towns of Namie and Tomioka and the villages of Iitate and Katsurao -- are set to reopen classes at local public schools in April this year, each setting up a school combining elementary and junior high courses. Following the nuclear accident, these four towns and villages set up temporary elementary and junior high schools in areas to which the entire communities had evacuated to continue classes.

The Namie and Tomioka municipal governments will operate schools both in their towns and in areas to which their residents have evacuated because many of them are taking shelter in areas relatively far from their hometowns. The Iitate and Katsurao municipal governments will reopen schools in their villages as many of their residents have sought shelter in areas from which it takes about an hour to travel to their home villages by car.

There were 482 school-age children who were registered as residents of Iitate at the time of the nuclear accident. Only 75 children wish to attend a local school, while 18 children in Katsurao, where 83 children were registered as residents at the time of the disaster's outbreak, wish to do so.

In Tomioka, 1,204 schoolchildren were registered as residents when the nuclear disaster broke out but only 16 want to go to local schools. In Namie, only 10 children wish to attend local schools out of some 1,440 who were registered as residents in March 2011. The numbers of children who intend to attend local schools include those from families who moved into these municipalities after evacuation orders were lifted.

The enrollment ratios in Iitate and Katsurao, where many children intend to commute to local schools while taking shelter elsewhere, were higher than those in Namie and Tomioka.

These four municipalities, which regard local public schools as the core of efforts to revitalize their communities, are mainly utilizing state funds for disaster recovery to encourage as many local schoolchildren as possible to attend schools in their hometowns.

Specifically, **the municipalities will make school lunches and school excursions free, operate school buses, open free after-school lessons and carry out thorough decontamination of school playgrounds and school roads, among other measures.**

Fukushima fish sold abroad for the first time since 3/11

March 1, 2018

Fukushima fish sold overseas for first time since nuclear disaster

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201803010046.html>

By KAZUMASA SUGIMURA/ Staff Writer

SOMA, Fukushima Prefecture--Fish caught off Fukushima Prefecture was set to be exported March 1 for the first time since the 2011 nuclear disaster.

The first overseas taker is Thailand, with about 100 kilograms of flounder and 10 kg of littlemouth flounder expected to be flown to Bangkok from Haneda Airport in Tokyo. The fish will be used in sushi and sashimi dishes served at 12 Japanese restaurants in the Thai capital.

"The export is encouraging news to us local fishermen as we are hoping to resume full-fledged fishing operations soon," said Kanji Tachiya, the 66-year-old head of the Soma Futaba fishermen's cooperative. The catch was unloaded Feb. 28 at a fishing port in Soma, which is located less than 50 kilometers north of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Flounder had been a staple fish in Fukushima Prefecture and fetched high prices prior to the triple meltdown that unfolded on March 11 seven years ago.

Fishermen in the prefecture went back to work in June 2012 on a trial basis after a more than one-year hiatus following the accident.

Seafood from the prefecture has since then only been permitted to be shipped after having its safety confirmed through radiation level checks.

Prefectural officials said no seafood had been found to show radiation levels higher than the national standards for almost three years.

However, the size of catches in 2017 was only 13 percent of pre-disaster levels, fishermen say.

While many consumers shun seafood caught in the prefecture due to its lingering negative image, distributors have been looking for buyers.

The idea for exporting the fish to Thailand was proposed by a trading house that had exported peaches grown in the prefecture.

"I would not like people in Thailand to miss out on the chance to eat the fish," said Yoshishige Sato, the 65-year-old president of Sato Suisan, the local company that bought the stock.

Fukushima flounder exported for first time since nuclear disaster

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180301/p2a/00m/0na/005000c>

SOMA, Fukushima -- Known as the pride of the Joban region along the Pacific coast, flounder caught off Fukushima Prefecture were exported on Feb. 28 for the first time since the nuclear disaster seven years ago.

- **【Fukushima & Nuclear Power】**

The shipment will make its way to Bangkok, where it will supply Japanese restaurants in the Thai capital with close to 1 ton of flounder by the end of March. On Feb. 28, the roughly 100 kilograms of ocean-caught fish were stacked into ice-filled cases at the market in Soma, Fukushima Prefecture. Each flounder weighed between 1.5 to 2 kilograms, and Soma Futaba fisheries cooperative head Kanji Tachiya, 66, said, "While the number of fish caught along the coast is still few, the fact that Fukushima fish will be tasted abroad motivates us."

The flounder along Fukushima's coastline have thick white flesh and excellent flavor, even fetching high prices at Tokyo's famous Tsukiji wholesale market. Restrictions on their export were lifted in 2016, and while business will continue on a trial basis, the flounder still cost 10 to 20 percent less than those caught in other regions.

The Fukushima Prefectural Government negotiated with a trading company in Thailand that did not impose import restrictions on marine products from the region following the nuclear disaster. Levels of

radioactive cesium in all of the roughly 25,000 types of marine products caught off the Fukushima coast surveyed by the prefecture have fallen below the domestic standard of 100 becquerels per kilogram since April 2015, and the aim is to increase the amount, type and destinations for exported fish in the future.

Greenpeace study shows significant radiation risks to last for decades to come

March 1, 2018

<http://www.greenpeace.org/japan/ja/news/press/2018/pr201803011/>

Greenpeace investigation shows Fukushima radiation risks to last into next century

Tokyo, 1 March 2018 - A comprehensive survey by Greenpeace Japan in the towns of Iitate and Namie in Fukushima prefecture, including the exclusion zone, **revealed radiation levels up to 100 times higher than the international limit for public exposure.**^{[1][2]} **The high radiation levels in these areas pose a significant risk to returning evacuees until at least the 2050's and well into next century.**

The findings come just two weeks ahead of a critical decision at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) review on Japan's human rights record and commitments to evacuees from the nuclear disaster. "In all of the areas we surveyed, including where people are permitted to live, the radiation levels are such that if it was in a nuclear facility it would require strict controls. Yet this is public land. Citizens, including children and pregnant women returning to their contaminated homes, are at risk of receiving radiation doses equivalent to one chest X-ray every week. This is unacceptable and a clear violation of their human rights," said Jan Vande Putte, radiation specialist with Greenpeace Belgium and leader of the survey project.

Greenpeace Japan conducted the investigations in September and October last year, measuring tens of thousands of data points around homes, forests, roads and farmland in the open areas of Namie and Iitate, as well as inside the closed Namie exclusion zone. The government plans to open up small areas of the exclusion zone, including Obori and Tsushima, for human habitation in 2023. The survey shows the decontamination program to be ineffective, combined with a region that is 70-80% mountainous forest which cannot be decontaminated.

Key finding from the Greenpeace Japan survey:

- Even after decontamination, in four of six houses in Iitate, the average radiation levels were three times higher than the government long term target. Some areas showed an increase from the previous year, which could have come from recontamination.
- At a house in Tsushima in the Namie exclusion zone, despite it being used as a test bed for decontamination in 2011-12, a dose of 7 mSv per year is estimated, while the international limit for public exposure in a non-accidental situation is 1 mSv/y. This reveals the ineffectiveness of decontamination work.
- At a school in Namie town, where the evacuation order was lifted, decontamination had failed to significantly reduce radiation risks, with levels in a nearby forest with an average dose rate of more than 10 mSv per year. Children are particularly at risk from radiation exposure.

- In one zone in Obori, the maximum radiation measured at 1m would give the equivalent of 101 mSv per year or one hundred times the recommended maximum annual limit, assuming a person would stay there for a full year. These high levels are a clear threat, in the first instance, to thousands of decontamination workers who will spend many hours in that area.

This contamination presents a long term risk, and means that the government's long-term radiation target (1mSv/year which is equivalent to 0.23µSv/hour) are unlikely to be reached before at least the middle of the century in many areas that are currently open and into next century for the exclusion zone of Namie. In an admission of failure, the government has recently initiated a review of its radiation target levels with the aim of raising it even higher.

The Government's policy to effectively force people to return by ending housing and other financial support is not working, with population return rates of 2.5% and 7% in Namie and Iitate respectively as of December 2017.

In November last year, the UNHRC's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on Japan issued four recommendations on Fukushima issues. Member governments (Austria, Portugal, Mexico and Germany) called for Japan to respect the human rights of Fukushima evacuees and adopt strong measures to reduce the radiation risks to citizens, in particular women and children and to fully support self evacuees. Germany called on Japan to return to maximum permissible radiation of 1 mSv per year, while the current government policy in Japan is to permit up to 20 mSv per year. If this recommendation was applied, the Japanese government's lifting of evacuation orders would have been halted.

"Our radiation survey results provides evidence that there is a significant risk to health and safety for any returning evacuee. The Japanese government must stop forcing people to go back home and protect their rights," said Kazue Suzuki, Energy Campaigner at Greenpeace Japan. "It is essential that the government fully accept and immediately apply the recommendations at the United Nations."

Notes:

[1] Reflections in Fukushima: The Fukushima Daiichi Accident Seven Years On

[2] The International Commission on Radiological Protection (ICRP) sets a maximum dose of 1 mSv/ year in normal situations for the public, and in the range of 1-20 mSv/y under post-nuclear accident situations, such as that resulting from Fukushima Daiichi. The ICRP recommends that governments select the lower part of the 1-20 mSv/year range for protection of people living in contaminated areas, and "to reduce all individual exposures associated with the event to as low as reasonably achievable."

First graduation ceremony

March 2, 2018

Fukushima school founded to support reconstruction holds first graduation ceremony

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180302/p2a/00m/0na/002000c>

HIRONO, Fukushima -- A high school founded in 2015 to train people to help with recovery from the nuclear disaster held its inaugural graduation ceremony here on March 1.

- **【Related】** Only 4% of kids in 4 disaster-hit Fukushima Pref. areas will attend reopened local schools
- **【Related】** Fukushima schools reopen for 1st time in 6 years after nuclear evacuation order lifted
- **【Related】** Only 28% of Fukushima children returning to former schools

A total of 140 students from the prefectural Futaba Future School, including 92 from the Futaba district where the Fukushima No.1 Nuclear Power Plant is located, received diplomas.

Former track athlete Dai Tamesue and TV advertising director, Hiroshi Sasaki, who served as lecturers at the school, attended the ceremony. School principal Junichi Tanno said, "You have recovered the things you lost in the disaster at this school. The world will change as much as you have changed."

A total of five prefectural high schools in the Futaba district were all temporarily closed in the spring of 2017 because the number of students had dropped sharply after the disaster even though classes continued in areas where the students evacuated. At Futaba Future School, which opened in April 2015, students choose from three courses with the aim to go on to university, become a top athlete or a specialist.

The school will move to a new building in the town and become an integrated junior and senior high school in April 2019.

Rebuilding communities a heavy burden

March 5, 2018

SEVEN YEARS AFTER: Overburdened staff rebuilding Tohoku face even grimmer times

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201803050056.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

March 5, 2018 at 18:20 JST

Work will likely get much tougher this year for employees in 42 municipalities who are already putting in dangerously-long hours to rebuild their communities from the 2011 quake and tsunami.

The number of "backup employees," or civil servants sent from other municipalities around Japan to assist in rebuilding efforts in the disaster-hit Tohoku region, will be scaled back by 21 percent in fiscal 2018 from the current year's level, according to a study by The Asahi Shimbun.

Thirty of the 42 municipalities expect to have fewer backup employees after the new fiscal year starts in April.

Half of the local governments in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima--the three hardest-hit prefectures in the March 11, 2011, disaster--expressed concerns about the physical and mental health of their employees. "Although projects to rebuild are proceeding, the burden of each civil servant is increasing" due to a shortage of staff, said a local official, echoing the desperation shared by many others.

Questionnaires were sent to the 42 cities, towns and villages in coastal areas of the three prefectures between January and February. The municipalities included those ordered to evacuate following the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, triggered by the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

According to the study, the number of backup employees was 1,358 in fiscal 2012, 1,353 in fiscal 2017 and will be 1,072 in fiscal 2018.

There are two ways to obtain backup staff. One is through the initiative of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, which asks local governments in other regions to send staff members based on the needs of the affected municipalities.

The other way is through relations established between the stricken local governments and the other municipalities.

According to the ministry, the number of backup employees dispatched under its initiative in fiscal 2017 was 1,330, a year-on-year drop of 12 percent.

As of January, the number was 210 fewer than what the disaster-hit municipalities said they needed.

The study also showed that overtime work was increasing in 19 municipalities.

Eight of the 19 municipalities said their busiest workers were clocking 100 to 150 hours a month, beyond the central government's 100-hour-a-month threshold for acknowledging the risks of "karoshi," or death from overwork.

Five local governments cited 150 to 200 hours a month.

Nakayuki Fujiwara, a 43-year-old official at the Minami-Soma city government in Fukushima Prefecture, said he works more than four hours of overtime almost every day.

Parts of Minami-Soma are located within the 20-kilometer zone of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Fujiwara oversees dozens of central government-subsidized rebuilding projects, such as construction of a certified nursery school and agricultural facility within the 20-km zone.

His job requires constant communication with central government officials, prefectural government officials and contractors.

He said he runs from office to office within city hall to save time.

In fiscal 2017, Minami-Soma, with a population of 50,000, secured a group of 40 civil servants from other municipalities primarily through pacts on helping each other in the event of a disaster.

The number of these backup employees is expected to halve in fiscal 2018 because many local governments have moved to curtail assistance.

If the number for his section is cut, Fujiwara said, "Our work will get stuck."

The central government's designated rebuilding period for the Tohoku region runs through fiscal 2020.

But 25 of the local governments said their work will not be completed by that time.

(This article was compiled from reports by Mitsumasa Inoue, Hiroki Koizumi and Hironori Kato.)

Yuji Morri's mission

March 5, 2018

Second-generation A-bomb survivor fights prejudice against Fukushima

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180305/p2a/00m/0na/010000c>

Yuji Morii watches over a construction site with the No. 1 reactor building visible behind him to the left, at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, on Feb. 7, 2018. (Mainichi)

Seeing parallels between radiation contamination bias toward Fukushima now and what he witnessed as a child toward Hiroshima, a second-generation A-bomb survivor requested he be transferred to join the nuclear plant decommissioning and support the restoration of the area.

Yuji Morii, 48, works at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant as an employee of the Tokyo-based IHI Plant Construction Co. Specifically, he oversees the construction and management of the tanks where water that has been purified of radioactive substances is held at the scene. Putting his all into his work decommissioning the plant is his "raison d'etre," in order to erase the bias toward the region following the 2011 nuclear disaster.

Morii's father Itsuji, 82, was exposed to radiation from the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima when he entered the city following the blast. Worrying about possible discrimination, he didn't share the story with anyone outside of the family. Morii himself also witnessed survivors, or "hibakusha," being showered with heartless comments time and time again, which led him to hide the fact that he was a second-generation hibakusha.

After graduating from college, Morii joined IHI Plant Construction in 1994. He was involved in the construction of things like fuel storage facilities for the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force and the undercarriage for launching rockets at the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency's Tanegashima Space Center in Kagoshima Prefecture.

He made his first visit to the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant in 2012, a year after the disaster when he was employed at his company's main office, to check the safety management at the construction site. Even in the middle of summer, workers toiled away in full-body protective suits and fogged up their full-face protective masks in the extreme heat, and the sight had a lasting effect on Morii.

After witnessing and hearing the worries of Fukushima Prefecture residents about the damage to their reputation caused by radioactive contamination, he felt that he had to join them in working toward the restoration of the region. He requested to be transferred to work at the plant, and in April 2016, his wish was granted.

Of the some 200 containment tanks manufactured so far, there has never once been an incidence of leakage or other issues.

"If there is trouble, then it breeds unnecessary anxiety, and we can't let that strengthen biases (toward Fukushima)," Morii said with pride. "Working consistently will lead to rebuilding trust."

When Morii began his work in the reactor complex, because of the high levels of radiation, workers could not remove their masks to drink water even if they were hot from their labor. Now, radiation levels are dropping and the working environment in the plant has also improved bit by bit.

Still, there is much work to be done to decommission the plant and revive the region. The importance of someone like him who understands the problems faced by the people of Hiroshima being drawn to Fukushima is not lost on Morii, and continues to motivate him.

"Fukushima has granted me an opportunity to come face-to-face with my own identity as a second-generation hibakusha," he said.

Memories of 3/11 are fading

March 5, 2018

Survey: 74% say 2011 disaster memories are fading

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20180304_12/

Many people affected by the March 11, 2011 earthquake and tsunami say they feel that the public's memories of the disaster are fading.

NHK conducted a survey between December and February, ahead of the 7th anniversary.

About 5,700 people were asked to take part. They included residents of Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima prefectures in northeastern Japan and evacuees of the nuclear accident in Fukushima.

Around 1,900, or more than 30 percent, responded.

74 percent said that memories of the disaster are fading.

Almost 70 percent said there are fewer visible signs of the impact of the quake and tsunami because damaged buildings have been removed and new residential areas have been constructed. They say the scenery of the affected areas has changed.

The respondents are divided on the issue of whether to preserve some buildings in a damaged state as reminders of what happened.

About 39 percent said they don't feel that more buildings should be preserved, while 31 percent disagree.

March 4, 2018

Returning to your school



Yuki Kokatsu, left, smiles as she finds her Japanese dictionary in Ono Elementary School in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, on March 2. She was a second-grader of the school at the time of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster. (Yosuke Fukudome)

March 4, 2018

Former students return to school 7 years after nuclear disaster

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201803040014.html>

By TAKUYA IKEDA/ Staff Writer

OKUMA, Fukushima Prefecture--Seven years after being forced to leave her belongings behind, Yuki Kokatsu returned to her second-grade elementary school classroom here for the first time.

Yuki, now 15, spotted her melodica instrument on the floor, and said, "I found it."

The third-year junior high school student also found 30 other items she had left when her family was forced to evacuate due to the Fukushima nuclear disaster, including a Japanese dictionary and a jump rope. She put them all into her cloth bag to take home.

"I feel that I was able to recover my lost possessions. I will keep and treasure them," said Yuki, who had evacuated to Tsukuba, Ibaraki Prefecture.

Yuki and other former Ono Elementary School students at the time of the disaster returned to their school on March 2 to retrieve their belongings.

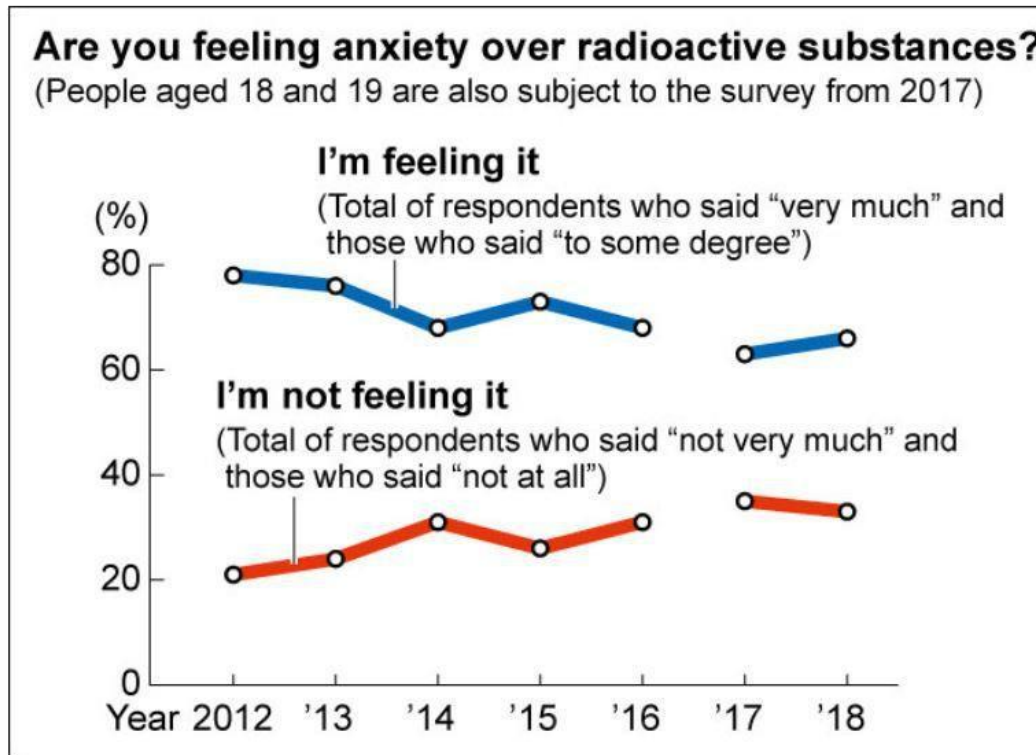
After the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011, which was triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, all the residents of Okuma town evacuated to other areas.

Ono Elementary School is located in an area that remains designated as a difficult-to-return zone.

However, the radiation level around the school has been lowered due to decontamination work. Because of that, former students and related people have asked the Okuma town government to allow them to enter the school building.

According to the Okuma town government, six groups visited Ono Elementary School on March 2. A total of 39 groups are expected to do so through March 4.

Radiation fears still there



March 5, 2018

SEVEN YEARS AFTER: Surprise finding in Fukushima as radiation fears increase slightly

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201803050049.html>

A gradual lessening of fears about the effects of radiation from the 2011 nuclear disaster reversed itself slightly as the seventh anniversary of the accident looms.

A joint survey by The Asahi Shimbun and Fukushima Broadcasting Co. found that 66 percent of Fukushima Prefecture residents still feel anxiety over radioactive substances spewed out of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant after it went into triple meltdown.

The figure, which had been on a downward trend in recent years, was up from 63 percent in the previous survey in 2017.

The Feb. 24-25 survey canvassed the views of 1,888 eligible voters living in the prefecture, excluding some areas that remained off-limits due to high levels of radiation. Respondents were randomly chosen by computer and contacted by landline. Valid responses were given by 1,004 voters, or 53 percent.

It was the eighth such survey since the nuclear disaster triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake that unleashed devastating tsunami on March 11, 2011.

Twenty-one percent of respondents said they are “very much” anxious about the effects of radiation, and 45 percent replied that they are feeling anxiety “to some degree.”

Against that total of 66 percent, 33 percent replied “not very much” or “not at all” with regard to anxiety. To a question about the course of recovery from the disaster, 45 percent of respondents agreed that it has been set. The breakdown was 3 percent saying “very much” and the remaining 42 percent answering “to some degree.”

On the other hand, 52 percent said the course has not been set yet. The figure included the categories of “not very much” and “not at all.”

Asked when residents will be able to live as they did before the disaster, 54 percent replied “more than 20 years later,” followed by 19 percent with “about 20 years,” 16 percent with “about 10 years” and 4 percent with “about five years.”

Even among those who replied that the course of recovery has been set, 47 percent answered “more than 20 years later.”

On the issue of whether to back the restart of idled nuclear reactors, 11 percent said they support it while 75 percent replied that they are opposed.

The percentage figure of those opposed to restarts was much higher than in a nationwide survey in February, in which 61 percent expressed that sentiment against 27 percent who were in favor.

Another question focused on plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s on-site storage of water containing difficult-to-remove tritium. As the number of storage tanks continues to pile up, TEPCO wants to discharge the water into the sea, a plan that won the support of the nation's nuclear watchdog body. Sixty-seven percent of respondents were opposed to diluting the water and discharging it into the sea, while 19 percent supported it.

Besides, 87 percent said they felt anxiety “very much” or “to some degree” about contamination of the sea caused by the discharge.

In addition, 52 percent said they felt anxiety “very much” over damages from rumors without substance about the safety of local seafood.

While 64 percent of respondents did not rate TEPCO's handling of the nuclear accident highly, 17 percent rated it highly.

Another question centered on moves by Fukushima prefectural authorities to switch from blanket testing for radiation of all bags of harvested rice to random checks.

Forty-nine percent were in favor of switching to a new system, while 44 percent were opposed.

The ratio of opposition was higher than in a nationwide survey in February in which 35 percent expressed opposition against 54 percent who supported it.

Eighty-six percent of the respondents answered that blanket testing had eased consumer concerns. The categories for this were “very much” and “to some degree.”

Radiation levels remain high

March 1, 2018

Radiation levels in Fukushima zones higher in 2017 than 2016, and still above government target despite cleanup: Greenpeace Japan

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/03/01/national/radiation-levels-fukushima-zones-higher-2017-2016-still-government-target-despite-cleanup-greenpeace-japan/#.WpgZY3wiGos>

Kyodo

Following the 2011 nuclear crisis, radiation levels at houses and areas nearby in a Fukushima village remain around three times higher than the government target despite cleanup work having been performed, an environmental group has said.

In some areas of the village of Iitate and the town of Namie, levels of radioactivity detected at some points among tens of thousands checked in surveys last September and October were higher than they had been the previous year, Greenpeace Japan said in a report released Thursday.

Most of the six houses surveyed in Iitate, located around 40 kilometers northwest of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 complex, logged radiation levels higher than the government-set target of 0.23 microsieverts per hour, ranging from 0.2 to 0.8 microsieverts per hour.

Some areas in the village had seen radiation levels rise from 2016, Greenpeace said. "There is a possibility (the environment) was contaminated again as radioactive materials that had accumulated in nearby forests may have moved around," it said.

One house, located near a municipal office with slightly wooded areas nearby, marked lower radiation levels compared with the previous 2016 survey but levels at another five houses — which are near forests that have yet to be cleaned up — have remained almost the same.

The points surveyed covered areas in Iitate and Namie where evacuation orders have been lifted as well as some parts of Namie that remain designated as "difficult to return" zones following the Fukushima nuclear disaster, which was triggered by the massive March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

The survey also showed that the effects of cleanup work conducted in 2011 and 2012 in the Tsushima district of Namie, located 40 km northwest of the Fukushima plant, had been limited, with one house there logging radiation levels of 5.8 microsieverts per hour at the highest readings and 1.3 microsieverts per hour on average.

The district is among areas designated as special reconstruction zones by the government. The state plans to carry out cleanup work and promote infrastructure development intensively at its expense to make such areas livable again.

Fukushima 7 years later

March 5, 2018

EDITORIAL: 7 years after, Fukushima still struggling to return to normal

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201803050026.html>

Almost one year has passed since the evacuation order for four municipalities around the ruined Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant was lifted to make it possible for local residents to return home. But the harsh reality of life in towns and villages devastated by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami and the consequences are clearly visible to anyone who visits these areas.

These towns and villages lack many of the functions and facilities to meet the essential needs of people such as housing, shopping, health and nursing care, jobs and communities. This is the reason why many of the local residents have not returned home despite an end to forced evacuation. A survey of evacuees by one local government found nearly 50 percent of the residents have no plan to return.

But it is also true that many of the people who left their towns and villages in the wake of the catastrophic accident want to eventually return home or are of two minds.

It is the government's important role to make things easier for evacuees to return to their former communities if they want to do so while supporting their current lives.

The government needs to review the measures that have been taken so far and, if necessary, adjust them to better suit the actual circumstances.

A myriad of challenges are threatening to thwart the efforts to rebuild towns and villages ravaged by the disaster. But progress is only possible through hard, tenacious work and constant adjustments for the better.

REALITIES DETER RETURN OF EVACUEES

In Namie, a town located north of the nuclear plant, the newly built Namie Sosei elementary and junior high school, which is to open this spring, held a school enrollment briefing at the end of January.

“Each child receives more sufficient attention at a school with a small number of students, I believe,” says a father of two in his 30s who left Namie with his family following the disaster and now lives in Iwaki, a city in the prefecture farther from the nuclear plant. He has decided to return to Namie so that his children can attend the new school.

The opening of the school will be “an important step forward in the efforts to rebuild Namie back into a normal town where we can hear the voices of children,” says Kiichiro Hatakeyama, head of the municipal board of education.

But the number of such families is still small. Only about 10 students are expected to enter the elementary and junior high school in the first year.

Before the 2011 disaster, more than 20,000 people lived in the town. Only about 500 of them had returned by the end of January since the evacuation order was lifted.

Many evacuated residents have been discouraged from returning to the town by the slow progress in the restoration of the living environment.

There are convenience stores in the town but not a supermarket. Local residents have to drive dozens of minutes to shop at the nearest supermarket.

The municipal government is courting supermarket operators to open a store in the town, but the population is still too small to support this kind of business.

There are only clinics for surgery and internal medicine in Namie. Many of the residents who have returned are elderly people, and they are asking for dentists and eye doctors.

NEW APPROACH NEEDED TO ESCAPE FROM SITUATION

The situation is more or less similar in Tomioka and Iitate, two other municipalities where the evacuation order was called off at the same time with Namie. The government’s strategy aimed at encouraging evacuated residents of these communities to return home by stepping up the decontamination efforts has failed to work as expected.

As the living circumstances remain poor, evacuated residents don’t go back to their homes. As the population thus remains small, services necessary for daily life remain unavailable.

To break this never-ending cycle, the central and local governments need to come up with better ideas to improve the living environment.

As for medical and nursing care services, the Fukushima prefectural government and the administration need to work together with organizations involved to provide active support for the efforts to secure service providers instead of leaving the task entirely to the municipalities.

A system should be created to provide policy support for retailers, not just for their preparations to restart their businesses, but also for their actual operations for a certain period of time.

There are obviously limits to what individual municipal governments can do independently to regenerate their cities, towns and villages.

Cooperation among areas, such as joint efforts by multiple municipalities to restore necessary functions and facilities, is essential.

There have been troubling signs that the government's policy to support the reconstruction of disaster-hit areas tends to focus on the building of new facilities.

Costly projects to build various facilities, such as research and development institutions in the areas of energy and robotics and large sports facilities, are under way in the region.

"Some local government chiefs are forging ahead with public works projects to build facilities in a rush to take advantage of the central government budget for post-disaster reconstruction while the money is available, but they are failing to think about the ongoing costs," says a senior official at the municipal government of one affected town. "The central government is also acting in a somewhat senseless manner."

The administration stresses the importance of helping rebuild the lives of local residents. But its priorities in allocating the financial and human resources seem to be messed up.

SUPPORT FROM ENTIRE SOCIETY

In disaster-stricken areas, the vital bonds between people have been totally destroyed by the effects of prolonged periods of living as evacuees. Local communities have also been hurt by conflict and division over such issues as the status of evacuees as to whether they can return home or how much compensation they have received.

Rebuilding the broken human ties is no easy task. But there are some encouraging signs as well.

In Naraha, where about 30 percent of the residents have returned since the evacuation order was lifted two and a half years ago, a small and casual Japanese restaurant named Yui no Hajimari, which opened in September last year, is thriving. At night, it is thronged with residents in the neighborhood and nuclear workers.

Kaori Furuya, the 33-year-old woman who runs the restaurant, used to work in the Tokyo metropolitan area but decided to start the business in the town after she became involved in a project to help people acquire the skills and abilities needed for the reconstruction of affected communities.

"I want to keep operating the restaurant as a place where local residents and people from outside the town develop contacts and enjoy spending time together naturally," Furuya says.

Iitate will soon launch a program to expand ties and communication with other parts of the nation. The program, dubbed "Furusato Juminhyo" (hometown certificate of residence), will involve various attempts to convey information about Iitate to people outside who want to support the town and provide them with opportunities to mix with local residents, according to the municipal government.

"We will test various ideas designed to build a new village instead of trying to restore the village to its former state," says Iitate Mayor Norio Kanno.

Seven years since the calamitous nuclear accident, people in Fukushima are still facing a grim reality and fighting an uphill battle to find a way to regain an environment that enables them to enjoy a peaceful and quiet daily life.

What must not be forgotten is the grave fact that the accident occurred in connection with the government's long-running policy of promoting nuclear power generation.

Our society is facing a serious test of whether it can keep this in mind and commit itself as a whole to supporting the affected communities' struggles to rebuild themselves.

A legacy of disasters



A pool whose roof has fallen in is seen at the "Rifure Tomioka" hot spring facility in Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture, on March 2, 2018, nearly seven years after the quake and tsunami disaster. (Mainichi)

March 7, 2018

7 years after quake, tsunami, Fukushima town records legacy of disasters

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180307/p2a/00m/0na/012000c>

TOMIOKA, Fukushima -- As Japan prepares to mark seven years since the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami that triggered the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, efforts are underway in the Fukushima Prefecture town of Tomioka to preserve visual records of the aftermath of the disasters.

- **【Related】** Only 4% of kids in 4 disaster-hit Fukushima Pref. areas will attend reopened local schools

Evacuation orders that were placed over the town following the outbreak of the nuclear disaster have mostly been lifted. While memories of the disasters are slowly starting to fade, a town ordinance has designated footage taken in the aftermath of the events of March 11, 2011 as a "legacy of the quake disaster." This includes images of clocks that stopped when the earthquake hit, and the interior of shelters that appear frozen in time. Officials plan to open an archive facility three years from now, and display the images there, teaching people the lessons learned from the disasters.

On the afternoon of March 2, a company contracted by the Tomioka Municipal Board of Education captured drone footage inside the gymnasium of Tomioka Daini Junior High School in the north of the town. On the day of the disasters, the school's graduation ceremony was held, and festive red-and-white striped decorations adorn the walls.

Empty cans of pilot bread that evacuees ate can still be seen lying about, and the gym appears exactly as it was before the town was placed under evacuation orders.

After taking this footage, a drone was used to capture images from the hot-spring facility "Rifure Tomioka," which stands in a "difficult-to-return zone." The images included Japanese style rooms where evacuees slept, and a pool whose roof had fallen in.

"For seven years after the disasters, people couldn't even clean up. We're preserving everything, including that fact," says 34-year-old town worker Takeshi Monma, who is qualified as a curator.

Analyzing the footage taken inside the shelters offers traces of the activities of residents at the time, and it is thought that this could provide lessons on such issues as the operation of shelters in the wake of future disasters.

Over 73,000 evacuees (after 7 years)

March 7, 2018

Evacuees from 2011 disaster number over 73,000

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20180307_34/

Nearly 7 years on from the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in northeastern Japan, tens of thousands of people have yet to return to their homes.

Japan's Reconstruction Agency said there were more than 73,000 evacuees as of February 13th. That's about 50,000 fewer than the year before.

About 53,000 people are living in prefabricated temporary housing, municipality-funded private residences, or welfare facilities. Nearly 20,000 are staying with relatives or friends.

About 50,000 Fukushima residents remained evacuated as of last month, according to the agency and the prefectural government.

Some areas of the prefecture have been off-limits to residents since the meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

About half of 35 affected municipalities in the 3 hardest-hit prefectures -- Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima -- have seen their populations drop by more than 10 percent.

March 7, 2018

More 2011 disaster survivors dying alone

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20180307_36/

A record-high number of survivors of the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami in northeastern Japan died alone last year.

Officials in Miyagi and Iwate prefectures say 63 people who lost their homes in the disaster and lived alone in temporary housing died unattended in 2017. 52 were in Miyagi and 11 in Iwate. That's 27 more than in the previous year.

A total of 235 people have met lonely deaths over the past 7 years. People aged 60 and above accounted

for 78 percent of the deaths. More than 20 percent were aged 59 or younger. At least one man was in his 20s.

A 42-year-old man who was found dead in public housing in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, had lost his parents and a younger sister in the tsunami.

A month after the disaster, he found a job removing debris with help from an NGO. He told NHK at the time that he was happy just to have work.

Prefectural officials attribute the increase to the aging of survivors in the disaster zone, and the fact that many people in temporary housing are single and elderly.

Dr. Ian Fairlie on nuclear evacuations



March 4, 2018

Fleeing from Fukushima: a nuclear evacuation reality check

<https://beyondnuclearinternational.org/2018/03/04/fleeing-from-fukushima-a-nuclear-evacuation-reality-check/>

By Dr. Ian Fairlie

(The following is an excerpt from a longer article on the subject of evacuations after severe nuclear accidents. While this section focuses on Fukushima, there are lessons here for all nuclear sites and the likely failure of "on paper" evacuation plans.)

If another severe nuclear accident, such as Windscale (in 1957), Chernobyl (1986) or Fukushima (2011) were to occur, then the most important response, in terms of preventing future cancer epidemics, is evacuation. The other main responses are shelter and stable iodine prophylaxis. Adverse health effects would primarily depend on wind direction and on the nature of the accident. This article looks primarily at the Fukushima evacuation and its after-effects.

When the Fukushima-Daiichi, Japan nuclear disaster began on March 11, 2011, evacuations were not immediate and some were hampered by the destructive after-effects of the Tsunami and earthquake that precipitated the nuclear crisis.

Once people were evacuated, little, if any, consideration seems to have been given to how long such evacuations would last. For example, the large majority of the 160,000 people who left or were evacuated from Fukushima Prefecture are still living outside the Prefecture.

Many are living in makeshift shelters such as shipping containers or prefabricated houses.

At present, the Japanese Government is attempting to force evacuees (by withdrawing state compensation) to return to less contaminated areas, with little success. Currently, seven years after the accident, an area of about 1,000 square kilometers is still subject to evacuation and no entry orders. This compares with the area of 2,700 square kilometers still evacuated and subject to no or restricted entry at Chernobyl, almost 32 years after the accident.

Experience of the Fukushima Evacuation

In 2015 and 2016, I visited Fukushima Prefecture in Japan with international study teams. These study tours were informative as they revealed information about the evacuations that differed from official accounts by TEPCO and the Japanese Government. From many discussions with local mayors, councillors, local health groups and small community groups, the following information was revealed.

The most common figure cited for evacuees is 160,000, of which 80,000 were evacuated by the authorities and the rest left to evacuate on their own, often on foot, cycles and carts. It took about two weeks to evacuate all parts of the initial 20 km (later 30 km) radius evacuation areas around the Fukushima reactors.

The main reason for the delays was that many roads in the Prefecture were jammed with gridlocks which sometimes lasted 24 hours a day, for several days on end on some roads. These traffic jams were partly due to the poor existing road infrastructure and partly due to many road accidents. These jams were of such severity that safety crews for the Fukushima nuclear station had to be moved in and out mostly by helicopter. All public transport by trains and buses ceased. Mobile telephone networks and the internet crashed due to massive demand.

Thousands of people either refused to leave their homelands or returned later. Older farmers often refused to leave their animals behind or be moved from their ancestral lands. In at least a dozen recorded cases, older farmers slaughtered their cow herds rather than leave them behind (dairy cows need to be milked daily): they then committed suicide themselves in several instances.

According to Hachiya et al (2014), the disaster adversely affected the telecommunications system, water supplies, and electricity supplies including radiation monitoring systems. The local hospital system was dysfunctional; hospitals designated as radiation-emergency facilities were unable to operate because of damage from the earthquake and tsunami, and some were located within designated evacuation zones. Emergency personnel, including fire department personnel, were often asked to leave the area.

At hospitals, evacuations were sometimes carried out hurriedly with the unfortunate result that patients died due to intravenous drips being ripped out, medicaments being left behind, the absence of doctors and nurses who had left, and ambulance road accidents. Many hastily-allocated reception centres (often primary schools) were either unable or ill-equipped to deal with seriously ill patients.

Much confusion resulted when school children were being bussed home, while their parents were trying to reach schools to collect their children. Government officials, doctors, nurses, care workers, police, firepersons, ambulance drivers, emergency crews, teachers, and others faced the dilemma of whether to stay at their posts or return to look after their families. In the event, many emergency crews refused to enter evacuation zones for fear of radiation exposure.

Stable iodine was not issued to most people. Official evacuation plans were either non-existent or inadequate and, in the event, next to useless. In many cases, local mayors took the lead and ordered and supervised evacuations in their villages without waiting for orders or in defiance of them. Apparently, the higher up the administrative level, the greater the levels of indecision and lack of responsibility.

In the years after the accident, the longer-lasting effects of the evacuations have become apparent. These include family separations, marital break-ups, widespread depression, and further suicides. These are discussed in a recent publication (Morimatsu et al, 2017) which relates the sad, often eloquent, stories of the Fukushima people. They differ sharply from the accounts disseminated by TEPCO.

Deaths from evacuations at Fukushima

Official Japanese Government data reveal that nearly 2,000 people died from the effects of evacuations necessary to avoid high radiation exposures from the Fukushima disaster, including from suicides. The uprooting to unfamiliar areas, cutting of family ties, loss of social support networks, disruption, exhaustion, poor physical conditions and disorientation resulted in many people, in particular older people, apparently losing their will to live.

The evacuations also resulted in increased levels of illnesses among evacuees such as hypertension, diabetes mellitus and dyslipidaemia, psychiatric and mental health problems, polycythaemia — a slow growing blood cancer — cardiovascular disease, liver dysfunction, and severe psychological distress. Increased suicide rates occurred among younger and older people following the Fukushima evacuations, but the trends are unclear. A 2014 Japanese Cabinet Office report stated that, between March 2011 and July 2014, 56 suicides in Fukushima Prefecture were linked to the nuclear accident.

Should evacuations be ordered?

The above account should not be taken as arguments against evacuations as they constitute an important dose-saving and life-saving strategy during emergencies. Instead, the toll from evacuations should be considered part of the overall toll from nuclear accidents.

In future, deaths from evacuation-related ill-health and suicides should be included in assessments of the fatality numbers from nuclear disasters.

For example, although about 2,000 deaths occurred during and immediately after the evacuations, it can be calculated from UNSCEAR (2013) collective dose estimates that about 5,000 fatal cancers will arise from the radiation exposures at Fukushima, i.e. taking into account the evacuations. Many more fatal cancers would have occurred if the evacuations had not been carried out.

There is an acute planning dilemma here: if evacuations are carried out (even with good planning) then illnesses and deaths will undoubtedly occur. But if they are not carried out, even more people could die. In such situations, it is necessary to identify the real cause of the problem. And here it is the existence of nuclear power plants near large population centres. In such cases, consideration should be given to the early closure of the nuclear power plants, and switching to safer means of electricity generation.

Conclusions

The experiences of Japanese evacuees after Fukushima are distressing to read. Their experiences were terrible, so much so that it requires Governments of large cities with nearby nuclear power plants to reconsider their own situations and to address the question.... what would happen if radioactive fallout

heavily contaminated large areas of their city and required millions of residents to leave for long periods of time, for example several decades?

And how long would evacuations need to continue.... weeks, months, years, or decades? The time length of evacuations is usually avoided in the evacuation plans seen so far. In reality, the answer would depend on cesium-137 concentrations in surface soils. The time period could be decades, as the half-life of the principal radionuclide, Cs-137, is 30 years. This raises the possibility of large cities becoming uninhabited 'ghost' towns like Tomioka, Okuma, Namie, Futaba, etc in Japan and Pripjat in Ukraine.

This bleak reality is hard to accept or even comprehend. However it is a matter that some governments need to address after Fukushima. It is unsurprising therefore, that after Fukushima, several major European states including Germany and Switzerland have decided to phase out their nuclear reactors.

For the full article with references, read here.

For more of Dr. Ian Fairlie's work, please visit his website.

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Time to push rents up?

March 8, 2018

Rent Hike Leaves Disaster Victims with Few Options

- Kazuaki Hirama

<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/nhknewsline/reinvigoratingtohoku/renthikeleavesdisaster/>

Swaths of land swallowed up by ten-meter high waves. Entire residential areas razed to the ground. The 2011 earthquake and tsunami left large parts of northeastern Japan barely standing.

The town of Namie was devastated by the disaster. Officials say almost 200 were killed by the tsunami.

Homes were heavily damaged or completely washed away. People have been living in public housing ever since.

The Japanese government says that enough years have passed for it to jack up the rent at these accommodations. The news has left many shocked and thinking of how they'll survive.

Hiromi Endo is one of these people. She gets mixed feelings when she returns to her old neighborhood.

"I feel so great when I hear the sound of waves."

She likes being by the ocean but she can't see it because a levee is blocking the view. The landscape is still desolate seven years after the tsunami washed away her home.

She and her husband are still just trying to get by, living in public housing for people affected by the disaster.

Last month, they received a shocking notice in the mail. Their rent is going way up.

"My mind went blank," she says. "I had no words and couldn't even think."

Next month, their subsidized rent will almost double. Then next year, it will more than triple to about a thousand dollars.

Endo says they are still paying off debt from their kids' tuition fees. She and her husband both work but she's unsure if they'll be able to make ends meet.

"I can't borrow any more money. If I borrow more money, it will just be more that I need to pay back anyway. I'll get deeper into a more difficult situation. I'm in a real dilemma right now."

Endo is not alone. Thousands of people in disaster-hit areas are about to be affected by the law. People who are in subsidized public housing will need to start paying more if they earn above a certain income. Critics say the government is scaling back help. Some local governments are chipping in the difference. But not all are.

Endo says when she thinks about the future, she's at a loss.

"If I can't live here, I only have one choice. I'll have to try to buy a house. But for now that is just a hope. I'm not even sure if the bank will let us take out another loan."

Endo says more than a thousand people have signed a petition for local authorities to chip in to help cover the cost of their rent hikes.

Meanwhile, construction crews are working to build up land to a higher elevation. And local authorities want to turn part of this area into an industrial zone, with the goal of building seafood processing centers. Plans for the future are taking shape, but in reality people are still struggling to restore their lives almost a decade after the disaster.

Scars of 3/11

March 8, 2018

SEVEN YEARS AFTER: Skeleton of house left to convey scars of 3/11 tsunami

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201803080073.html>

By YOSUKE FUKUDOME/ Staff Writer

NATORI, Miyagi Prefecture--A seriously damaged house is being left to stand all alone here as a witness to the 2011 tsunami that savaged this coastal area.

The partially collapsed roof and walls and the exposed pillars and floors of the house will remind the next generation of the terrifying nature of the disaster, which ripped apart the Kitakama district.

"We need no words," said Eiji Suzuki, the owner of the house, which was built in 1986. "If people look at this, they can immediately sense the horror of the disaster at first glance."

The two-story wooden structure was strengthened at the end of 2017 to prevent it from totally collapsing. Suzuki, 76, survived the tsunami by the skin of his teeth, fleeing the home with the first floor submerged and escaping to nearby Sendai Airport.

Before the disaster, there were 123 households in the district, which is located between the coast and the airport.

When the area started to be reconstructed, damaged houses were demolished one by one.

Although some people say, "it's painful to remember the disaster whenever we see the house," Suzuki decided to leave the shell of his house standing as compelling evidence.

He also feels attached to the land that his father worked as well as the house, which is filled with memories of living with his three grandchildren and his eldest son and son's wife.

"I want to preserve this house as long as it doesn't hamper regional redevelopment efforts," said Suzuki.

Still struggling to cope

March 8, 2018

Concerns Remain over Future of Areas Hit by March 2011 Disaster

- Kazuaki Hirama

<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/nhknewsline/reinvigoratingtohoku/concernsremainover/>

In March 2011, an earthquake and tsunami caused massive devastation in northeastern Japan and triggered the worst nuclear accident in Japan's history.

Beyond devastation at the plant, the disaster also affected the lives of thousands of people. Many are still struggling to cope with the aftermath today. Iitate village is one area that was hard-hit. It's about 40 kilometers from the crippled nuclear plant.

7 years ago, Iitate village had fields full of cattle and farmers. Agriculture was the lifeblood for the region before the disaster. But now, the fear is that life will never return to what it was. The current landscape is full of giant bags full of dirt and plants, all contaminated by radiation.

Authorities want to move the bags to a temporary storage facility near the plant, but are having a tough time getting all the land they need to build the facility. There's another constant reminder of the disaster -- posts measuring radiation levels in the area.

Iitate's evacuation order was lifted last year. Authorities say it's safe for people to live here again. But only a fraction of people have returned. Six-thousand villagers used to live here. About 600 have come back.

One farmer who is determined to restore his life in the village where he lived for almost 7 decades shared his thoughts.

It's tough for Minoru Kobayashi to look out on this land and still see it in a state of disrepair. He was born and raised in Iitate. Two hundred cattle breeders lived here before the nuclear disaster. Only a few, including Kobayashi, have returned.

"This is my hometown. There's nowhere else I could live. I've come back knowing that it's not going to be easy," he says.

Everyone was ordered to leave the village after the nuclear disaster. Kobayashi and his family evacuated to a neighboring prefecture. When the evacuation order was lifted last year, he immediately returned home with his wife.

He's built new barns. The old ones had to be torn down because of radiation levels. But rebuilding his life has been much harder. Stores where he used to shop are closed. His old friends are gone.

Kobayashi says the hardest part is being separated from his son. Kobayashi's son decided not to return because he has a baby and lingering safety concerns.

"My son's family is living far away from where we live. If we were closer, maybe we could help each other out and even work together," says Kobayashi.

Kobayashi and his wife worry that life will never be the same in Iitate, and that some people might never return.

"I really miss people. I miss speaking with other villagers. So I always attend local gatherings. There are a number of them that have taken place. I feel at home at those events. They warm my heart," says his wife, Mieko.

Kobayashi says he plans to keep working for at least another decade. He says he's learned to survive by focusing on success and not dwelling on failure. The situation in Iitate is not unique. Most evacuation

orders in Fukushima prefecture were lifted last year. But only 15 percent of people have returned, and nearly half are over the age of 65.

Many young people say one of the reasons why it's difficult to come back is because there are no jobs. People with small children still worry about radiation. People like Kobayashi say local governments need to do more to draw people back to these areas. Those authorities say they're trying by offering tax incentives and other benefits, but it's not easy. So while safety concerns may be decreasing, questions about the long-term future of disaster-hit areas are not.

Return to Namie ?



March 10, 2018

Photo Journal: Rare return

(Mainichi)

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180310/p2a/00m/0na/002000c>

An 83-year-old woman, Reiko Konno, is seen inside her old home in the town of Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, in a "difficult-to-return" zone, for the first time in about a year, on Feb. 26, 2018. The Tsushima district of the town, where Konno's house is located, was categorized as a zone of this type after the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster in 2011. The district includes four settlements, each of which has its own special dance for rice planting. However, the dance connected to Konno's settlement has only been performed once since the outbreak of the nuclear disaster, and there are no specific plans to resume it. "Being the age I am, I've basically given up on coming back to Namie. However, I really don't want this house to be demolished," Konno said in a trembling voice, wiping her tears away time and time again. (Mainichi)

7 years on

March 11, 2018

Japan marks 7 years since triple disaster

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180311/p2g/00m/0dm/011000c>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Japan marked the seventh anniversary Sunday of the massive earthquake and tsunami in 2011 that left more than 18,000 people dead or missing and led to one of the worst nuclear disasters ever.

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Around 73,000 people have yet to return to their hometowns in the aftermath of the triple disaster that began with a 9.0 magnitude earthquake on March 11.

The waves engulfed the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant located on the Pacific coast, disabling emergency generators needed to operate pumps necessary to cool its reactors, leading three to melt down and causing hydrogen explosions and the release of radioactive material after the earthquake.

At 2:46 p.m., when the massive quake shook northeastern Japan, disaster survivors and people in various parts of the country observed a moment of silence. A state-sponsored memorial ceremony was held in Tokyo attended by Prince Akishino and disaster survivors.

"With the passage of seven years, I can see that reconstruction of the affected region is steadily making progress," Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said during the ceremony.

But work remains to be done so more people can return to areas affected by the nuclear disaster, Abe said, pledging to speed up reconstruction and provide "seamless" support through different stages of livelihood rehabilitation.

"I would like to make a firm pledge here that the government will exert its united efforts to build a strong and resilient nation that is resistant to disasters."

Even after seven years, rebuilding the lives of survivors remains a challenge and their emotional scars have yet to be fully erased.

"The disaster was an overwhelming ordeal in my life," said Hidetoshi Onodera, a survivor who represented Miyagi at the ceremony.

"Until last year, I felt uncomfortable just looking at the ocean, but this year on New Year's Day I visited Nobiru Beach to watch the sunrise for the first time since the disaster," the 69-year-old said.

"The bright and shining sun and the sound of the waves changed my feelings toward life," he said.

Some 7,000 households are still living in prefabricated provisional housing in the three hardest-hit prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima.

More than 90 percent of the planned 30,000 public apartment units for evacuating households have been built, with the remaining expected to be completed by the end of March next year.

But few evacuees are willing to leave the temporary housing and start new lives in unfamiliar places.

Decontamination and other efforts are under way to enable people who lived near the disaster-stricken nuclear plant to return to their hometowns.

But even though evacuation orders have been lifted in many areas around the nuclear facility, about 50,000 of the affected people now reside outside Fukushima Prefecture because of nuclear concerns and for other reasons.

Safety concerns about nuclear power generation have remained strong. On Friday, four opposition parties jointly submitted a bill calling for the halt of operations at all nuclear power plants in Japan.

Helping to lead that effort is Junichiro Koizumi, a former prime minister who became a strong opponent of atomic power generation after retiring from politics.

But it is unlikely the "zero nuclear power" bill will be enacted as the Abe government maintains its pro-nuclear policy. It seeks to restart offline nuclear plants, in addition to three that are currently operating out of the 45 commercial reactors in the country.

People in Fukushima visit 3.11 memorial

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20180311_10/

People in Fukushima Prefecture paid tribute to the victims of the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami on the 7th anniversary of the disaster on Sunday.

Bereaved families and friends offered prayers in front of a cenotaph built next to a memorial in a coastal area in the city of Soma. It bears the names of 458 people who died in the tsunami.

A man in his 80s said he lost a brother and friends to the tsunami. He said he wishes they had escaped and were still alive. He said it was the first tsunami he experienced and that he did not expect it to cause so much damage.

A woman in her 70s said her relatives were killed in the tsunami. She expressed hope that people will soon be able to live with a sense of normalcy.

7 years since 3.11 disaster, nuclear accident

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20180311_04/

Sunday marks 7 years since the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami as well as the onset of the nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant.

A magnitude 9.0 quake occurred in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of the northeastern region of Tohoku at 2:46 PM on March 11th, 2011.

The quake generated tsunami waves, which hit coastal areas of Tohoku and elsewhere with waves of more than 10 meters in height.

The National Police Agency says that, as of Friday, a total of 15,895 people in 12 prefectures were confirmed dead and 2,539 others in 6 prefectures remained missing.

The Reconstruction Agency says that, as of the end of last September, at least 3,647 people in 10 prefectures had died due to health problems and other reasons while they were evacuees.

The number of evacuees peaked at about 470,000. The Agency says that, as of February 13th, 73,349 people were still living as evacuees nationwide because of delays in rebuilding efforts, among other reasons.

About 28,000 public housing units for survivors who lost their homes due to tsunami waves or other reasons but could not afford to rebuild on their own had been completed as of the end of January. That's about 94 percent of the target.

Over 46,000 survivors have relocated from temporary housing and elsewhere to those public units. But about 41 percent of the public housing residents are elderly, creating issues related to senior citizens living alone.

NHK compared the populations of the 3 worst-hit prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima before and after the disaster.

The results show that about half of 35 municipalities in those prefectures recorded a decline of more than 10 percent in their populations as of February 1st this year, compared to March 1st, 2011.

Most evacuation orders issued for areas in Fukushima Prefecture after the nuclear accident had been lifted by last year.

But 9 relevant municipalities say, as of last month, only about 15 percent of people whose residency was registered in those areas were actually thought to be living there.

Areas with relatively high radiation levels still remain off-limits.

Over 70.000 still displaced



A woman from Saitama lays a bouquet of lilies and chrysanthemums on the beach in Sendai's Arahama district on March 10, a day before the seventh anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. (Noboru Tomura)

March 11, 2018

SEVEN YEARS AFTER: Over 70,000 still living elsewhere from 2011 quake and tsunami

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201803110022.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Some 73,000 people remain displaced on March 11 on the seventh anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster that struck the nation's northeastern region, according to the Reconstruction Agency.

Although roads, railways and homes have been rebuilt in the stricken Tohoku region, the outflow of population continues from devastated areas, particularly from coastal communities.

Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures--the three hardest-hit prefectures--saw a combined decline in population of 250,000, compared with pre-disaster levels.

The prefectures are also suffering from a drop in overnight tourist numbers, which have not returned to pre-disaster levels.

In Fukushima Prefecture, the evacuation order for four municipalities that were exposed to high levels of radiation from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant accident was lifted about a year ago.

But not many residents are returning to live in their hometowns.

Agricultural production also has not rebounded to levels prior to the nuclear disaster.

Compensation paid by Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the crippled Fukushima plant, to evacuees for their mental distress will end in March. TEPCO cited as the reason the lifting of the evacuation order for the municipalities.

On March 11, 2011, the magnitude-9.0 quake and towering tsunami left more than 22,000 people dead or missing, according to Reconstruction Agency and National Police Agency data. The figure includes people who later died while evacuating.

March 9, 2018

Learning from the lessons of 3/11, seven years on

https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2018/03/09/editorials/learning-lessons-3-11-seven-years/#.WqZJU4hG1_8

It's been seven years since the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, which took more than 18,000 lives. While efforts continue to rebuild the lives of survivors shattered by the disasters, we must not let the memory of those tragic events fade away. Instead we must continue to learn from the lessons of 3/11 to better understand how to prepare for, defend against, and recover from future disasters in this quake-prone country.

The events that took place on March 11, 2011 — a mega 9.0 magnitude quake originating 130 km off Miyagi Prefecture that caused a giant tsunami which ravaged coastal communities along a wide stretch of northeastern Honshu — serve as a reminder that a disaster of unprecedented scale can happen at anytime. Since then, the nation has experienced all sorts of natural disasters big and small — and will undoubtedly face more in the future.

Were we prepared enough to defend ourselves against the tsunami on that day? Are we better prepared seven years on? These are the kinds of questions we need to ask as we look back on the events of 3/11. It was a 15-meter-high tsunami — which Tokyo Electric Power Co. termed “beyond any assumption” — that flooded Tepco's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, causing it to lose the emergency power needed to keep the reactors cool and resulting in core meltdowns in three of the six reactors. Efforts to clean up the mess and decommission the plant continue to inch forward — a process that is expected to take decades to complete. Meanwhile, evacuation advisories to municipalities in areas around the crippled plant — formerly designated as no-go zones due to the radioactive fallout from the Tepco plant disaster — have gradually been lifted following decontamination efforts. The reconstruction of community lives, however, remains slow.

How and why the Fukushima nuclear disaster took place — and whether the steps taken in the aftermath to deal with the damage have been adequate — must be constantly questioned and reviewed to prevent a recurrence.

Seven years on, reconstruction of the tsunami-ravaged areas has made progress, but efforts to rebuild the shattered lives of many survivors are only halfway through.

Public infrastructure has been steadily restored. Of the railway lines destroyed or suspended in the disasters, only a 20.8 km section between Tomioka and Namie stations of the JR Joban Line and a 55.4 km section between Miyako and Kamaishi stations on the Yamada Line remain out of service, and are

scheduled to be reopened in fiscal 2018 and 2019, respectively. The construction of public housing and apartments to accommodate people who lost their homes has been 80 percent completed in Iwate Prefecture and 90 percent in Miyagi and Fukushima. The development of land for those who wish to rebuild their houses in the tsunami-ravaged areas is also more than 80 percent finished.

At the same time, some 7,000 families continue to live in prefabricated housing units — supposedly temporary shelters — in the three prefectures that suffered the heaviest damage. Most of the local municipalities anticipate that the units will be vacated by the end of fiscal 2020, but this isn't the case for some temporary units in Fukushima that accommodate people forced to evacuate their homes in the wake of the Tepco plant meltdowns.

Roughly 73,000 people remain displaced from their homes after they evacuated from the tsunami and the nuclear disasters, living in the temporary housing units, rented apartments or relatives' and friends' homes across the country. As life away from home became protracted, many have chosen to resettle in the places where they evacuated. Of the 42 municipalities in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima, more than half — 24 — have suffered a population decline of at least 10 percent compared to before the 2011 disasters. The decline is acute in the tsunami-ravaged towns, including Onagawa (39 percent) and Minamisanriku (32 percent) in Miyagi Prefecture. In Fukushima, seven municipalities have sustained population drops of more than 70 percent, including the towns of Futaba and Okuma —the site of the Tepco plant — where all residents remain evacuated.

The evacuation advisories have been lifted in most of the former no-go zones around the Tepco plant — except for areas where habitation is deemed difficult over the long term due to high radiation levels. But the return of the former residents remains slow. Of the 49,000 people registered as residents in the areas where evacuation advisories were lifted in recent years, it's estimated that only about 15 percent actually live there.

The areas devastated by the 3/11 disasters have come a long way. But they still have a long way to go.

Problems of renewables in Fukushima

March 11, 2017

Fukushima powers toward 100% goal on renewables as grid and cost woes linger

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/03/11/national/fukushima-powers-toward-100-goal-renewables-grid-cost-woes-linger/#.WqY57XwiGos>

by Eric Johnston
Staff Writer

OSAKA – Seven years after the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, Fukushima Prefecture remains committed to becoming an international center for renewable-energy research and a domestic pioneer by meeting 100 percent of its energy demand via renewables by 2040. But grid connection issues, investment costs and a government policy that still favors investment in other energy sources — especially nuclear — continue to present challenges to researchers, businesses and Fukushima policymakers with an interest in renewable energy.

In 2014, the prefecture announced it was aiming to have renewables supply 40 percent of its energy demand by 2020, two-thirds by 2030 and 100 percent by 2040.

As of April 2017, renewable energy accounted for 28 percent of the prefecture’s energy needs and about 60 percent of its electricity consumption.

Fukushima’s installed capacity in renewables, excluding large-scale hydropower, had reached nearly 1.4 gigawatts by early 2017, equivalent to one large nuclear reactor. This included 925 MW of solar power, 209 MW of biomass and 174 MW of wind, with small shares for geothermal (65 MW) and small-scale hydro (17 MW).

The prefecture also hosts several organizations promoting renewable energy, including the Fukushima Renewable Energy Institute in Koriyama, which is part of the National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology. There, researchers look into improving the technology, efficiency and use of several forms of renewable energy, including photovoltaic, wind, shallow geothermal and geothermal. The institute also does research on using hydrogen obtained from renewable energy sources.

“With technological support from the institute, a support program for local businesses in the quake- and tsunami-damaged areas is being carried out and human resources are being developed in collaboration with local universities. As a result, there have been 107 joint research projects implemented and nine successful examples of commercialization,” said Masaru Nakaiwa, the institute’s director-general, in an e-mail interview with The Japan Times.

“As a research institute playing a role in a new energy society for Fukushima, the Fukushima Renewable Energy Institute has been tying up with local business, and it’s gratifying to see the results,” said Masayoshi Hamada, state minister for reconstruction, after a third tour of the institute in February.

Yet while official and public enthusiasm over renewable energy has grown since 2011, and while over 15 percent of Japan’s electricity was generated by renewables in fiscal 2016, Nakaiwa said that does not mean that renewable energy is spreading compared with other OECD countries.

“The big problems remain cost and grid connection capacity, although it’s remarkable that we’ve seen a recent movement in the manufacturing industry, the backbone of support for Japan, to steadily expand its use of renewable energy. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals have drawn international attention, and the fact that visible consideration for the environment is greatly reflected in a firm’s value is thought to be the main reason” for the shift, he said.

In September 2016, the central government created a renewable energy plan for Fukushima that meant additional support for maximizing its use in Fukushima, including the development of “smart” communities.

The plan gave a particular boost to long-standing government and industry efforts at storing and using hydrogen produced from other renewable energy sources.

In January, Tadashi Mogi, a senior official at the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry’s Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Department, updated a meeting of the International Renewable Energy Agency on what was going on in Fukushima.

“The potential of solar and wind power in Fukushima is maximized. Currently, delivering the electricity produced by such renewable sources to the large power-consumption areas like Tokyo is unfeasible due

to a lack of transmission capacity. But development of transmission lines will begin at a high pace from next year," he said.

Mogi also noted that pilot projects had been initiated at so-called smart communities in five cities and towns in Fukushima. These include Shintchi, Soma, Namie, Naraha and Katsurao. In those projects, electricity and heat from distributed power sources and renewable energy are supplied to public facilities or even an entire urban district.

The government sees Fukushima-generated hydrogen in particular as a key energy source and plans to promote it internationally in 2020.

"The Fukushima Plan for a New Energy Society, which is the pioneer of this basic strategy, has already begun its activities," Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said in December at a meeting of the Ministerial Council on Renewable Energy, Hydrogen and Related Issues. "In Namie, a hydrogen production project of the world's largest scale, using renewable energy with zero CO2 emissions, started last summer. Clean hydrogen made in Fukushima will be used for the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games."

Wind, particularly offshore wind, is another renewable energy source that Fukushima is pursuing. The Fukushima Offshore Wind Consortium is supported by METI and includes major firms like Marubeni, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries and Hitachi Ltd. The project now has three turbines: 2-MW and 5-MW turbines from Hitachi and a 7-MW turbine from MHI.

The Japan Wind Power Association has proposed that onshore and offshore wind power provide 36GW of electricity by 2030, equivalent to the output of about 30 nuclear power plants. The central government has set a target of generating 820 MW from offshore wind turbines by 2030. As of February 2017, there were nine offshore wind projects nationwide, including fixed and floating offshore turbines that were generating nearly 60 MW.

In March 2017, the association identified a number of problems with offshore wind power in Japan, including cost and poor electric grid infrastructure in areas with good wind like Hokkaido and Tohoku. The more populated central and western parts of Japan, where grid infrastructure is often better, have only moderate wind speeds, making it difficult for wind farms to turn a profit. Also cited as hurdles were legal issues over the common use of sea areas as well as concerns from politically powerful fishing unions. In Fukushima itself, a 2017 prefectural survey showed support for renewable energy remained strong, with 54 percent of respondents saying they wanted to keep using it in their daily lives and 14 percent saying they did not.

Between local efforts to meet the 2040 goal of 100 percent use, and central government and business support for Fukushima to become a testing ground for renewable energy technologies, the march toward moving Fukushima from a nuclear past to a renewable future continues.

This is part of a series looking at how the Tohoku region is attempting to rebuild itself seven years after the March 11, 2011, disasters.

Climate change: Where is the long-term vision?

March 10, 2018

Long-term climate plan needed

https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2018/03/10/editorials/long-term-climate-plan-needed/#.WqZInYhG1_8

Legislation promoting ways to adapt to climate change, recently submitted to the Diet, will require both national and local governments to work out plans to cope with and reduce damage from global warming, such as worsening floods due to extreme weather, intrusion of new diseases and decline in the quality of agriculture. Despite measures taken to fight climate change, further rises in global temperatures in coming decades appear unavoidable, the impact from which is already affecting our lives today. Adapting to climate change will require steady efforts based on a long-term strategy, so the efforts need to start today. The Paris accord was adopted in 2015 by both developed and developing countries at a United Nations conference on climate change. Based on voluntary efforts by participants to cut their greenhouse gas emissions, the agreement aims to keep the rise in average global temperature from pre-industrial levels well below 2 degrees Celsius and pursue efforts to cut the increase even closer to 1.5 degrees. There is no guarantee, however, that the goal will be achieved. The United States, the world's second-largest emitter after China, has announced its departure from the Paris agreement under the administration of President Donald Trump. The sum total of plans submitted by countries taking part in the accord is deemed insufficient to keep temperature rises below the levels feared to cause severe damage, such as more frequent natural disasters and destruction of ecosystems.

Global warming is progressing. The world's average temperature is already about 1 degree above pre-industrial levels. A special report of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warns that the average temperature may climb to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels as early as the 2040s. The Meteorological Agency says Japan's average temperature has been rising by 1.2 degrees every century. One forecast says the temperature here will increase faster than the global average, increasing by as much as 5.4 degrees by the end of the 21st century compared with 100 years earlier.

Under the proposed legislation, local governments will be urged to develop plans to adapt to climate change — either alone or in cooperation with others — by taking their own conditions into account. The environment minister will assess the impact of global warming every five years, and the national government will review its adaptation plan, devised in 2015, on the basis of the assessment. The National Institute for Environmental Studies in Tsukuba, Ibaraki Prefecture, will serve as the center for analyzing the effects of global warming. The legislation also calls on the nation to push technological cooperation with developing countries on measures to adapt to climate change.

The legislation, once enacted, will make it easier for national and local governments to secure funding for measures to cope with global warming. It is also hoped that the legislation will facilitate inclusion of measures to mitigate the impact of climate change in the government's other programs and policies. A measure to build a higher seawall to guard against rises in sea levels due to global warming, for example, can be combined with anti-tsunami steps taken in coastal areas deemed at high risk of a major earthquake. Greater chances of flooding due to climate change may require a long-term effort to move communities and their public facilities, such as municipal offices, hospitals and schools, to higher and safer ground.

Japan is already experiencing various problems associated with climate change, such as more frequent and severe flooding caused by torrential rains, increases heatstroke cases, and lower crop yields due to higher temperatures. Assuming that the rises in temperature will continue, steps may need to be taken to develop new varieties of farm products that withstand warmer weather or encourage farmers to grow other types of crops. Agricultural experimental stations in each prefecture may not be fully equipped to develop such new varieties. The government should take the initiative for broad cooperation among national institutions, universities and the experimental stations.

Global warming may bring to Japan diseases now unknown in this country. Mosquitoes that spread dengue fever will likely become widespread. Changes in ecosystems are also likely to intensify. It will be

important for both national and local governments to try to foresee what could happen and take steps to prepare for and mitigate the potential damage. While pushing measures to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases and contain climate change, Japan needs to work out a long-term strategy to live with the changes wrought by global warming.

Decontamination starts in no-entry zone

March 14, 2018

Decontamination work begins in Fukushima town

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20180314_29/

Media have been allowed to watch decontamination work at a post-disaster reconstruction hub inside the no-entry zone set up after the 2011 nuclear accident in Fukushima Prefecture, northeastern Japan.

Reporters were invited on Wednesday to a kindergarten in the town of Okuma, about 7 kilometers from the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

Work began there last Friday to remove radioactive substances from the kindergarten's 7,000-square-meter playground. Workers will weed grass as tall as an adult, and replace contaminated topsoil with new earth.

The central government has recognized an 860-hectare zone around the railway station in Okuma as a reconstruction hub based on the local administration's plan.

Utilities and other infrastructure will be rebuilt and some houses will be demolished at the request of residents to provide them with a livable environment.

Okuma was designated as an area where residents could not return due to high radiation levels. Authorities plan to lift the evacuation order in about 4 years.

Okuma is the second municipality in the prefecture after the town of Futaba where decontamination work has begun at reconstruction hubs.

Similar projects are set to kick off in other municipalities in the fiscal year starting in April.

Gas station reopened 3km from nuclear plant

March 15, 2018

SEVEN YEARS AFTER: Gas station a beacon of hope for deserted Fukushima town

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201803150049.html>
THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

FUTABA, Fukushima Prefecture--A gas station here that opened more than a century ago is proving to be a vital lifeline for construction projects that could eventually revive this deserted town.

Dateya, established during the Meiji Era (1868-1912), is just 3.5 kilometers from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

But it was forced to close because of the nuclear accident in 2011.

It only reopened last June after being given special permission to operate along National Route 6 through which convoys of trucks travel daily as construction work continues on an interim storage facility for contaminated materials and the tentatively named Futaba interchange along the Joban Expressway.

The gas station is located in a no-entry zone that is designated by the central government as a "difficult-to-return zone" for former residents due to high radiation levels.

Before the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami disaster that triggered the nuclear accident, selling and delivering heating oil to local residents accounted for almost all of Dateya's sales in wintertime.

Its current sales are only one-third of pre-disaster levels as there is no demand for heating oil in a town where all the residents are still living as evacuees.

Selling and delivering fuel to the construction sites accounts for 80 percent of Dateya's sales.

It stays open even after dark so truck drivers and construction workers can refuel their vehicles.

Still, uppermost in the mind of 42-year-old Tomonari Yoshida, Dateya's fifth-generation owner, is "when we will be able to deliver heating oil again."

"We are grateful that people from all over Japan who have no special links with our town have come here to help with the construction work," Yoshida said.

"Most of them work while separated from their families. We local people also need to do our best."

(This article was written by Tetsuro Takehana and Shigetaka Kodama.)

Thai restaurants refuse to serve Fukushima fish

March 13, 2018

Bangkok restaurants stop serving fish recently imported from Fukushima Pref.

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180313/p2a/00m/0na/002000c>

FUKUSHIMA -- Eleven Japanese restaurants in the Thai capital of Bangkok have stopped serving imported fish caught off the coast of the Fukushima prefectural city of Soma, the prefectural government here said on March 12.

The decision of each restaurant came following fears that they might experience a backlash and a reduction in customer numbers -- fueled by citizen group protests that have spread online -- even though Thailand does not restrict the import of goods from Fukushima Prefecture.

Consignments of fresh seafood including flounder, fluke and octopus have been exported from Fukushima Prefecture to Thailand since late February -- the first export of seafood from the prefecture since the

disaster at Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO)'s Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant in 2011. It is not sure when the restaurants will start offering the fish again.

According to the Fukushima Prefectural Government, 143 kilograms of fish have been exported to Thailand since Feb. 28, with about 50 kilograms being consumed at an event starting on March 2 that was jointly hosted by the 11 restaurants.

However, consumer groups in Thailand have been directing protests toward the country's Ministry of Public Health, saying, "Don't make citizens here eat dangerous fish." Meanwhile, the ministry has stated that a thorough inspection has been conducted and the fish is safe.

Event promoting Fukushima fish cancelled

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20180313_03/

An event in Thailand promoting flounder from Fukushima has been cancelled amid concerns from consumers.

The event was being held at a Japanese restaurant and scheduled to run through the end of the month. The export of flounder caught in waters off Fukushima was resumed on March 1st for the first time since the 2011 nuclear accident.

The Fukushima prefectural government says a consumer group raised concerns about the safety of the fish. The group said the fish were caught in contaminated waters and dangerous to eat.

The group also reportedly demanded the Thai government announce the name of a local restaurant that sold the fish.

Consumers took to social media to voice their concerns.

Organizers say they cancelled the event to avoid confusion.

Nearly 130 kilograms of flounder have been exported from Fukushima to Thailand but close to half remains untouched. Exports are essentially halted.

A Fukushima government official said the prefecture will continue to promote the safety of the fish in hopes of once again resuming the exports.

Thai govt. detects no radiation in Fukushima fish

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20180313_31/

The government of Japan's Fukushima Prefecture hopes to export more flounder to Thailand after the Thai government's tests showed no radioactive substances in the fish.

Exports of flounder caught off Fukushima resumed on March 1st for the first time since the 2011 nuclear accident. The fish were the first marine products from the prefecture to be sold abroad since the accident.

The flounder was being promoted at Japanese restaurants in Thailand. But the promotion was cancelled

on Monday after local consumers voiced concerns about the fish's safety. Flounder exports have essentially been halted.

Fukushima prefectural officials say they were notified late on Monday that the Thai health ministry detected no radioactive material in the fish.

They plan to call attention to the fish's safety through online video sites, social media and food tasting events for local consumers.

See also : <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/03/14/national/organizers-cancel-bangkok-event-promote-fukushima-fish-groups-voice-safety-concerns/#.WqkXQnzA-os>

Trauma and psychological help

March 12, 2018

EDITORIAL: 7 years from 3/11 disaster, need for psychological help still strong

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201803120026.html>

A woman visited a mental health clinic in Fukushima Prefecture after North Korea test-fired ballistic missiles last summer.

The National Early Warning System (J-Alert) issued an alert, calling on residents to evacuate, in Hokkaido and 11 other prefectures in eastern Japan.

The woman said the development revived in her the memory of the Fukushima nuclear disaster. She was well aware the situation was different, but she was having the shivers, and she felt afraid to be alone, the woman said.

Seven years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami struck northeastern Japan on March 11, 2011, and triggered meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

New public housing complexes and rezoned plots of land for roads greet the eye in areas affected by the disaster. Infrastructure development is nearing the end of the process.

But **that does not mean residents in those areas can now live with peace of mind.**

Some people in disaster zones have recently begun complaining about their physical and mental states, saying they are again tormented by fear and a sense of loss. That is a serious development.

In Miyagi Prefecture, for example, there were 3,195 children who did not attend elementary and junior high schools in fiscal 2016, up 362 year on year. In particular, the junior high school non-attendance rate in the prefecture was higher than anywhere else in Japan. Many have pointed out that the 2011 disaster is partly responsible.

"With progress in the rebuilding process, various new problems are arising," Miyagi Governor Yoshihiro Murai told a news conference last week.

PSYCHIATRIST: TRAUMA CAN REMAIN ENTIRE LIFE

Some disaster survivors may appear to be living peacefully, although they have something stuck deep in their hearts.

Ryoji Aritsuka, a psychiatrist in Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, warned that sort of psychological wounds, if left unattended, could drag on for a very long time in the survivors' lives.

Aritsuka's belief is based on his experiences in Okinawa Prefecture, where he worked until five years ago. He saw elderly citizens there who said they still sometimes had to endure sleepless nights because of memories of World War II.

One said that the sound of firecrackers and images of the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered a flashback of wartime scenes. One woman blamed herself for the sole of her foot being sore, saying that she was being punished for having stepped on a dead human body.

Masahide Ota, a former governor of Okinawa Prefecture, who had been mobilized as a student soldier, said in delirium on his deathbed, "Look for a cave!" "Hurry and give bullets to the soldiers!"

Aritsuka and coworkers found, in a study of survivors of the Battle of Okinawa, that 40 percent of their subjects were suspected of having post-traumatic stress disorder.

They were exposed so abruptly to a force of overwhelming power beyond their control. They saw innumerable lives being lost so unreasonably before their very eyes. They felt remorse over having survived while others died. They lost all their families, properties and foundations of life and could no longer return to their native places.

Survivors of the Battle of Okinawa endured all that 73 years ago. So did the survivors of the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and Fukushima nuclear disaster.

SO MANY INDIVIDUALS, SO MANY APPROACHES

Okinawans were not the only Japanese who had to endure hardships of the war.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki were subjected to atomic bombings. Other areas suffered air raids. Postwar repatriation of Japanese from overseas was also a process ridden with tragedies.

In the postwar period, Japan was hit by numerous disasters, which added further to the inventory of sorrowful memories.

The bodies and souls of humans are bound to cry out with pain when they try to confine such traumatic remembrances forcibly within themselves.

Attempts are going on in areas affected by the 2011 disaster to heal psychological wounds with the help of public administrative bodies and volunteer workers. Those who had heartbreaking experiences have an opportunity to have heavy loads taken off their hearts by sharing stories and emotions among themselves, because doing so allows them to realize that they are not alone in experiencing a difficult time.

It should not be forgotten, meanwhile, that the speed of the "rebuilding process" of the heart differs from person to person.

Students in a seminar presided over by Kiyoshi Kanebishi, a professor of sociology with Tohoku Gakuin University, have collected stories of dreams from survivors of the disaster.

A young man said he has sweated many times, as one and the same scene from his memory has returned to him over and over again in his dreams. He was in a schoolyard parting with a friend, who perished in the tsunami immediately after that.

The story of another man is somewhat different. He said that, immediately following the disaster, his late wife used to appear in his dreams and pleaded to "come back," but she later began saying that she "wouldn't go anywhere," which gave him motivation for living his own life.

IT CAN TAKE DECADES TO BEGIN TELLING STORIES

More than a few disaster survivors believe there is no use, after all, in recounting stories of their experiences.

Residents of Fukushima Prefecture, in particular, are facing conflict and mutual distrust over the decisions they have made on evacuation from the nuclear disaster and over the compensation money they have received. That makes it difficult for them to share stories even with their relatives and neighbors, or all the more because they are relatives and neighbors.

Some believe they are not qualified to tell their own stories, because they know that others suffered more seriously. Forcing those people to speak up would only deepen their wounds.

Maiko Yoshikawa, an associate professor of psychology with Okinawa University, said one man has made a strong impression on her.

He was attending sessions for sharing war experiences, but he never said anything about himself. He only began speaking one day, when the sessions had been held for nearly six years. He said he was a soldier, and he took the lives of a parent and child.

“That was tough for me, but I couldn’t tell anybody,” Yoshikawa quoted the man as saying.

He didn’t want to tell his story, but he also wanted it to be known. The heavier the burden, the longer it probably takes before the time is right.

The healing of psychological wounds does not mean forgetting about those who perished. Nor does it mean putting the lid on memories. It means a process whereby disaster survivors learn to look back on their past as an indispensable building block of what they are now.

To make that happen, those in their surroundings should keep supporting them and watching over them over the long term.

Each of us should strive to be somebody who is close to the hearts of individual disaster survivors and is available to listen to their stories in the fullness of time.

Court orders damages be paid to voluntary evacuees

March 15, 2018

TEPCO, state told to pay 3/11 evacuees who left on their own

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201803150056.html>

By RYUTARO ABE/ Staff Writer

KYOTO--The district court here ordered the government and the operator of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant on March 15 to pay a combined 110 million yen (\$1 million) to 110 evacuees who fled voluntarily after the 2011 nuclear disaster.

Presiding Judge Nobuyoshi Asami at the Kyoto District Court ruled that the government and plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. were liable on grounds that they failed to take adequate measures to protect the plant from the tsunami that inundated the facility after the Great East Japan Earthquake. The court noted the government’s “long-term assessment” for possible earthquakes unleashing tsunami compiled in 2002. The report pointed to the possibility of a powerful earthquake and tsunami striking the plant.

All of the 174 plaintiffs from 57 families had evacuated to Kyoto Prefecture without an evacuation order except for one individual from Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture.

Tomioka was within the 20-kilometer radius from the plant ordered to evacuate after the crisis unfolded on March 11, 2011, triggered by the magnitude-9.0 quake and tsunami.

Apart from Fukushima, the plaintiffs were from Miyagi, Ibaraki, Tochigi and Chiba prefectures.

The plaintiffs plan to appeal the court decision, as 64 were not awarded compensation.

The plaintiffs sought 846.6 million yen collectively in damages from the government and the utility.

The district court ruling marked the fifth in a series of similar lawsuits brought across the nation. In all five cases, the respective courts acknowledged TEPCO's responsibility to pay damages to the plaintiffs.

The Kyoto District Court's decision was the third to acknowledge the government's responsibility.

The key issues in the Kyoto case were if the towering tsunami that swamped the plant was foreseen, if the government had authority to force TEPCO to take countermeasures against such an event, and if the amount of compensation paid by TEPCO to voluntary evacuees based on the government's guidelines was appropriate.

Most of the plaintiffs sought 5.5 million yen each in damages.

In the ruling, the district court determined that TEPCO should pay additional compensation on top of the amount set in the government guidelines to 109 plaintiffs who fled voluntarily despite not being subject to evacuation orders.

The criteria for extra payment are distance from the plant, radiation levels around homes, and family members who require medical attention due to the exposure to radiation.

Among the plaintiffs who were awarded additional compensation were those from Chiba Prefecture, just east of Tokyo and roughly 240 km from Fukushima Prefecture.

The court stated that the extra payment should be based on damage they suffered over two years after they began evacuating.

In the lawsuits filed at three other districts, some of the plaintiffs who evacuated voluntarily were awarded additional compensation, ranging from 10,000 yen to 730,000 yen per person

See also : <https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180315/p2g/00m/0dm/051000c>

Court orders compensation for Fukushima evacuees

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20180315_17/

Another Japanese court has ordered the government to compensate evacuees of the 2011 accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

About 170 people who moved from Fukushima Prefecture to Kyoto Prefecture, in western Japan, had sought nearly 8 million dollars from the government and the operator of the nuclear plant, Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO.

They sought compensation for their psychological suffering due to the loss of their livelihoods.

The case focused on whether the government and TEPCO should have foreseen and prevented damage from massive tsunami.

The case also focused on the amount of compensation offered by the government and its responsibility to those evacuated from undesignated areas.

Many of the plaintiffs lived in areas not designated for evacuation.

The government and TEPCO denied responsibility, claiming there was no way to scientifically predict massive tsunami at the time of the accident.

On Thursday, the presiding judge at the Kyoto District Court acknowledged the responsibility of the

government and the utility.

This is the fourth ruling in cases filed by evacuees, and the third to hold the government responsible.

Fourth ruling orders TEPCO to compensate evacuees

March 16, 2018

Tokyo court orders payments for evacuees of nuke disaster

By RYOTA GOTO/ Staff Writer

In the fourth such ruling, a district court on March 16 ordered the central government in addition to Tokyo Electric Power Co. to compensate evacuees fleeing from the 2011 triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The Tokyo District Court found the central government and TEPCO responsible for contributing to the psychological stress suffered by 42 evacuees and ordered the defendants to pay a total of about 60 million yen (\$566,000) in compensation.

The lawsuit was filed by 47 individuals in 17 households who fled from Fukushima Prefecture to Tokyo in the wake of the nuclear disaster. Significantly, 46 of those individuals evacuated voluntarily from areas where any order was issued by the government.

The plaintiffs had sought a total of 650 million yen in compensation on the grounds that their normal daily lives were upended following the March 2011 accident, causing them psychological stress.

About 30 such lawsuits have been filed around Japan, and the March 16 ruling was the sixth decision so far by a district court. Four rulings have held the central government liable for the nuclear disaster and ordered it to pay compensation.

Less than one third of Fukushima businesses have reopened

March 21, 2018

Only 30% of businesses have reopened in Fukushima nuclear disaster-hit areas: survey

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180321/p2a/00m/0na/004000c>

FUKUSHIMA -- Only some 30 percent of businesses have resumed operations in areas within a 30-kilometer radius of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant or in districts that were previously marked as evacuation zones, a Fukushima Federation of Societies of Commerce and Industry survey has found.

- **【Related】** Bangkok restaurants stop serving fish recently imported from Fukushima Pref.
- **【Related】** Decommissioning Fukushima reactors will take time but progress continues
- **【Related】** Only 30% of local gov'ts hit by 3.11 want to host Tokyo 2020 athletes, visitors: survey

As for the stagnation in the region's economic renaissance, a representative from the federation said, "There are few residents, and along with anxiety over whether or not business will be able to turn a profit, it is also hard to secure young workers."

The investigation covered 14 local societies of commerce and industry, recording the business climate as of Feb. 20, 2018. The percentage was particularly low in the four municipalities of Namie, Tomioka, Iitate and Kawamata, for which evacuation orders were partially lifted between March and April 2017.

In the town of Namie, of the 597 members of the local society of commerce, 262 operators, or 44 percent, restarted their companies or shops -- but only 34, or roughly 6 percent of the total, did so in Namie itself. The remaining 228 businesses all reopened in the locations to which their owners evacuated after the disaster.

Meanwhile, in Tomioka, 277 businesses of the 478 society members reopened, but only 60, or 13 percent, did so in the town. The numbers were slightly higher for Iitate, where 130 of the 167 operators restarted their businesses -- 51 of whom did so in the same area, for 31 percent.

Of 2,804 total members of the prefectural-level federation as a whole, 1,840 companies and shops reopened (66 percent), with 31 percent or 860 businesses returning to open shop in the affected areas. By industry, construction saw the biggest revival rate at 37 percent, followed by manufacturing at 35 percent, stone work and miscellaneous businesses at 32 percent and the service industry at 28 percent, no doubt boosted by reconstruction efforts.

The evacuation locations for the residents of Namie are divided into inland areas like Fukushima city and coastal areas, and it is reportedly hard for owners to restart businesses while commuting from these locations. At the end of February 2018, the population of Namie was 17,954 people, but only 516 people actually lived in the town along with reconstruction workers.

The operator of a supermarket before the disaster commented, "If people don't return, then it's difficult to secure enough employees and impossible to run a business."

Animals left behind in Fukushima



The 3/11 kitten that wasn't

<https://beyondnuclearinternational.org/2018/03/16/the-3-11-kitten-that-wasnt/>
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The “forbidden life” of those caring for abandoned animals in Fukushima

By Linda Pentz Gunter

For a while, it was an iconic photo of the March 11, 2011 triple disaster in Japan. The bedraggled, mud-soaked kitten clinging to a boot, practically begging to be rescued. The picture was everywhere on the internet. Had the kitten been caught in the tsunami? Was it a victim of the earthquake? Or was it one of the many abandoned animals left behind when more than 160,000 people fled the radioactivity released by the deadly Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear power plant disaster?

Simple internet searches yielded no apparent source for the photo. It fell into an unspoken rights-free virtual world where many of us used it to exemplify the desperation of Japan's triple tragedy.

And then it turned out that the kitten wasn't in Japan at all. Thanks to some shoe-leather sleuthing by a site called pudicat.com, we learned that the picture was actually taken during flooding in Hoi An, Vietnam. (And no, the boot man didn't take the kitten with him, but his explanation can be found here.)

Of course countless animals like this kitten were indeed abandoned in Japan due to the natural disasters and the forced exile of those living too close to the stricken nuclear plant. Some international rescue groups did go in to try to help, but early on found conditions and access restrictions challenging if not prohibitive.

However, there were also individuals and groups in Japan who were not willing to sit back and watch animals starve. In addition to the rescue operations, a spay-neuter organization began work to prevent the inevitable proliferation of pets who, if they had survived at all, had now become strays. Shelters were eventually built with funds donated by supporters.

But there were some, chronicled in several remarkable films, who either never left, or who quickly returned to Fukushima Prefecture, with one sole purpose in mind: to look after the animals. Their charges soon multiplied and for some, it has become a full-time vocation.

In a 2013 ITN short news segment, we are introduced to 58-year old Keigo Sakamoto, who had already established an animal sanctuary in Nahara, just over 12 miles from the Fukushima plant. He was one who refused the order to evacuate, then found himself completely trapped within the zone, cut off from supplies. He survives on the generosity of individuals and stores outside the zone where he regularly collects discarded food and other supplies essential to keeping his animals — and himself — alive. Then there are farmers who returned to save their livestock. One such, 53-year old Naoto Matsumura, is featured in the 18-minute Vice documentary, *Alone in the Zone*. He lives in what was then the ghost town of Tomioka — whose station reopening story we featured last week. But Matsumura could not accept the idea that dogs, cows, goats, ducks and even ostriches should be cast off without a care.

At first he evacuated with his family, fearing all the reactors were going to blow. But when his family faced rejection by relatives who said they were “contaminated”, and the hassle of evacuation shelters became unendurable, he returned home alone. And stayed. “I couldn’t leave the animals behind,” he said. “I am opposed to killing off the animals in the zone.”

Feeding them, and refusing to sign the “death warrant” requirement from the government, will, he hopes, spare them from slaughter. “So many of their fellow cattle died in pain,” he said, recalling the tragedy of cows left in barns to starve. “To me, animals and people are equal.”

Which brings us back to cats. There is a delightful photo sequence of Matsumura, taken by photographer Ota Yasusuke, featuring the kittens the farmer adopted and befriended who have now become his steadfast companions.

Another film, *Nuclear Cattle*, recalls the agonizing end endured by so many livestock, and is hard to watch. It includes disturbing images of dead cows, their heads stooped into empty feed buckets. (You are duly forewarned.) The unnamed cattle farmer in the 5-minute trailer rails against the same law that Matsumura is defying — that all exposed cattle must be slaughtered, even though they would never be used for human consumption. He and other cattle farmers rebel. “The government tells us to kill cows we take care of with affection,” says one.

Those farmers who do give up, bring flowers and incense to the burial sites where their slaughtered cows are deposited. They tell a reporter they are “heartbroken.” Others who keep going notice strange physical symptoms on their cows that they feel cannot be explained other than by exposure to radiation. All of these animals, and the people who tend to them, are living what *Nuclear Cattle* calls a “forbidden life.”

<https://youtu.be/gS-q-2893uw>

posted on March 16, 2018 by beyondnuclearinternational

TEPCO ordered again to pay compensation

March 23, 2018

Seventh court orders TEPCO to pay evacuees from Fukushima

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201803230033.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

■ District court rulings on Fukushima evacuees' compensation lawsuits			
Ruling	Compensation amount	Central government responsibility	TEPCO responsibility
Maebashi (March 2017)	About 39 million yen for 62 plaintiffs	○	○
Chiba (September 2017)	About 376 million yen for 42 plaintiffs	×	○
Fukushima (October 2017)	About 500 million yen for 2,907 plaintiffs	○	○
Tokyo (February 2018)	About 1.1 billion yen for 318 plaintiffs	Central government not defendant	○
Kyoto (March 2018)	About 110 million yen for 110 plaintiffs	○	○
Tokyo (March 2018)	About 59 million yen for 42 plaintiffs	○	○
Iwaki branch of Fukushima (March 2018)	About 610 million yen for 213 plaintiffs	Central government not defendant	○

The Asahi Shimbun

A seventh court ruling has ordered Tokyo Electric Power Co. to pay compensation to evacuees whose daily lives were turned upside down after the 2011 disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The Iwaki branch of the Fukushima District Court on March 22 ordered the utility to pay a total of 610 million yen (\$5.8 million) in compensation to 213 plaintiffs. The court said the company failed to take measures that could have prevented or reduced the damage to the nuclear plant from the tsunami that devastated coastal areas of the Tohoku region.

Like some previous rulings against TEPCO, the Iwaki branch awarded a compensation amount that went beyond the central government's guidelines. The ruling included payments for the "loss of one's hometown," which covers the destruction of community life, concerns about radiation exposure as well as loss of psychological support.

The court ordered an additional 700,000 yen to 1.5 million yen per plaintiff depending on the evacuation order level that was issued for their neighborhoods.

The central government was not named as a defendant in the latest lawsuit, but the trend so far could influence other litigation before various district courts around Japan. About 30 lawsuits have been filed by Fukushima evacuees.

In five of the seven lawsuits in which the central government has been named as a defendant, four rulings have ordered Tokyo to pay compensation as well.

In those four rulings, the district courts pointed to a 2002 study that mentioned the possibility of a tsunami-spawning earthquake striking in a wide area ranging from off the Sanriku coast in the Tohoku region to off the coast of the Boso Peninsula in Chiba Prefecture.

Based on that study, TEPCO calculated that a tsunami as high as 15.7 meters could possibly hit the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The four rulings concluded the central government was responsible for compensation because of its failure to instruct TEPCO to take measures that could have limited the tsunami damage to the plant.

The rulings have varied in their judgments on when it was possible to assume a tsunami would strike off the coast where the nuclear plant is located. The periods have ranged from "sometime within 2002" to "2006 at the latest."

The rulings have also varied on when the central government should have issued instructions or orders to TEPCO, from "about the end of 2002" to "March 2008 at the latest."

March 22, 2018

Another court orders TEPCO to pay damages to Fukushima evacuees

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180322/p2g/00m/0dm/092000c>

FUKUSHIMA, Japan (Kyodo) -- A Japanese district court on Thursday ordered the operator of the crippled Fukushima power plant to pay 610 million yen (\$5.7 million) in damages to evacuees from the 2011 tsunami-triggered nuclear disaster, the seventh such decision against the utility.

In the lawsuit at the Iwaki branch of the Fukushima District Court, 216 plaintiffs, most of whom are evacuees from areas within 30 kilometers of the Fukushima Daiichi plant, sought a total of 13.3 billion yen in compensation from Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc.

The latest ruling is the seventh among 30 similar lawsuits filed nationwide by evacuees and victims seeking damages from TEPCO alone or both the utility and state.

The plaintiffs, including bereaved family members of the evacuees, argued the operator could have foreseen the accident caused by the massive tsunami based on the government's 2002 long-term assessment of major quakes, and demanded damages for their "loss of hometown" in addition to the amount already paid by TEPCO.

TEPCO, meanwhile, said it could not have predicted the tsunami and claimed that damages have been paid to the evacuees in accordance with the government's compensation guidelines.

In another court ruling involving TEPCO on Thursday, the Sendai High Court in the northeastern prefecture of Miyagi rescinded part of an earlier decision by a district court and said Tepco should clean up farmland contaminated by radiation following the Fukushima disaster.

The high court returned the case to the Fukushima District Court for further examination. In the suit, eight farmers and an agricultural entity from five Fukushima municipalities urged TEPCO to ensure the radiation contamination of farmland is returned to pre-disaster levels.

"It is clear that TEPCO should conduct the (decontamination) work," Presiding Judge Hisaki Kobayashi said.

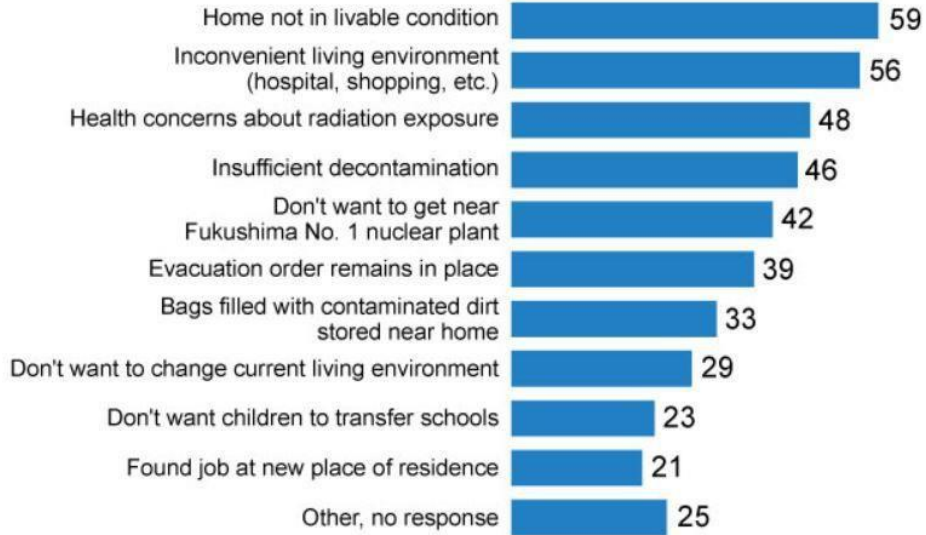
The plaintiffs demanded Tepco replace the top 30 centimeters of contaminated farmland with clean soil.

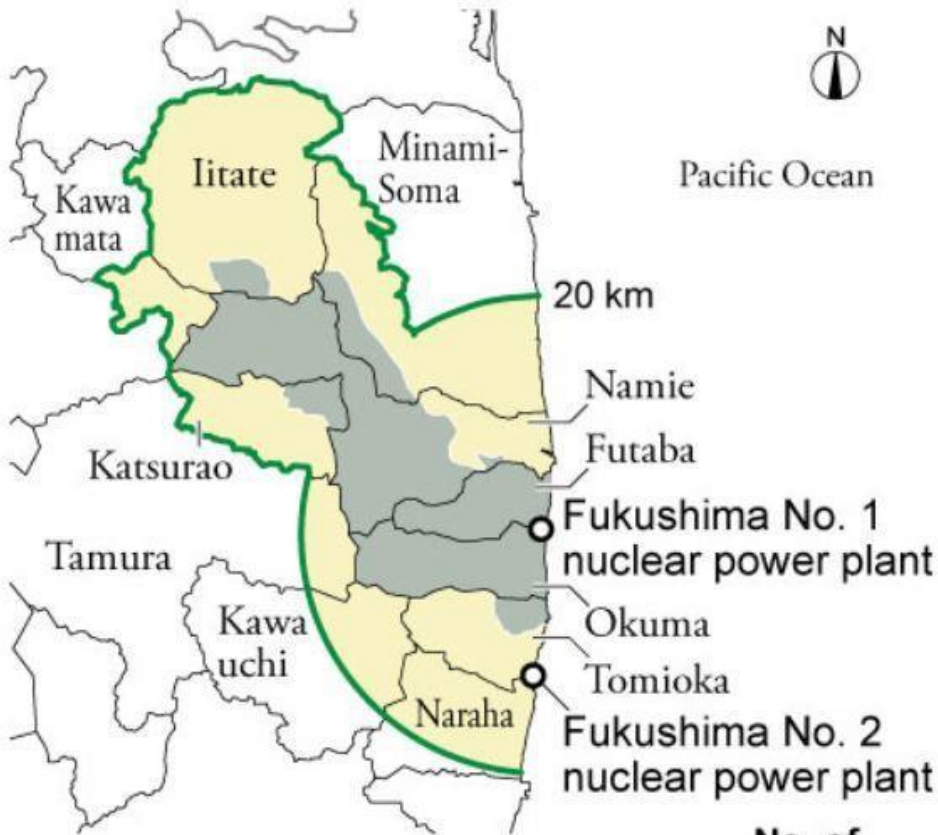
In April last year, the district court rejected their claims, saying a process to remove only radioactive materials from soil has not been established.

(Not) returning home

Reasons evacuees are not returning to Fukushima homes

(Multiple responses)





	No. of registered residents
Areas covered by evacuation order	23,873
Order lifted	49,162
Total	73,035

(As of February 2018, based on prefectural government inquiries to municipal governments)

March 22, 2018

SEVEN YEARS AFTER: Only trickle of former residents returning home to Fukushima

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Close to a year after evacuation orders were lifted in four municipalities near the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, only 6.1 percent of evacuees have returned to live in their former communities.

According to a survey of displaced residents, the top reasons cited for not returning were **the condition of their homes, concerns about radiation and the lack of hospitals and stores.**

The Asahi Shimbun has conducted annual surveys of evacuees since June 2011 with Akira Imai, a senior researcher at the Japan Research Institute for Local Government.

In the latest survey, questionnaires were sent in mid-January to 329 individuals who participated in past surveys. Valid responses were received from 161 individuals now residing in 19 prefectures around Japan aged between 28 and 91.

Of the respondents, 114 were still living as evacuees.

Close to 70 percent of the respondents said the measures taken by the central and local governments leading up to the lifting of the evacuation order on March 31 and April 1, 2017, were insufficient. Regarding those results, Imai said, "The lifting of the evacuation order was conducted without adequate consideration for the hopes of the evacuees to have their communities returned to their former condition."

Last year's lifting of the evacuation order covered areas of the four municipalities of Namie, Tomioka, Iitate and Kawamata that were outside the difficult-to-return zones.

In the joint survey, respondents were asked about measures taken by the central and local governments to decontaminate irradiated areas and construct social infrastructure. A combined 109 respondents said the measures were insufficient or somewhat insufficient.

They were asked their reasons for not returning.

Multiple answers were allowed, and the most popular response given by 59 people was because their homes were not habitable. Forty-eight people raised concerns about radiation exposure on their health. The inconvenience of not having shops and hospitals nearby was cited by 56 people.

One 46-year-old resident of Namie who lives as an evacuee with her husband and two children in central Fukushima Prefecture has no plans to return because there are no hospitals in the community capable of looking after her oldest daughter, who has an illness that could require emergency care.

While the rates at which evacuees have returned to the four municipalities range between 3.5 percent and 31.1 percent, the rates have not necessarily increased dramatically in the other municipalities where evacuation orders were lifted before spring 2017.

While the rates are between 80 and 81 percent for Tamura and Kawauchi, it is only between 19 and 34 percent in the three other municipalities where the orders were lifted prior to spring 2017.

The reality of suffering

March 26, 2018

EDITORIAL: Payouts to nuke evacuees should match reality of their suffering

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201803260013.html>

The Kyoto and Tokyo district courts have ruled in succession that the government is responsible, along with Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), for the disaster at the utility's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

About 30 group lawsuits have been filed by evacuees from the disaster, which was triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in 2011. District courts have so far ruled on seven of them, including five in which the government is the co-defendant. Four of those rulings went against the government. The government has maintained that the legal liability lies with TEPCO, whereas it is only socially responsible. But the civil suits are setting a precedent for denying that claim.

The opinion of the judiciary, which says the tsunami was foreseeable and the disaster could have been prevented if only the government had appropriately exercised its authority, should not be taken lightly. All individuals who are tasked with the safety of nuclear power plants should take it seriously.

Having learned lessons from the disaster, Tokyo has taken a series of measures, including establishing the Nuclear Regulation Authority, a body independent from ministries and an agency that is a proponent of Japan's nuclear energy policy.

That said, however, there should be no end to the pursuit of safety. The government should make unremitting efforts to aggressively assimilate state-of-the-art knowledge to eliminate even the slightest chance of another nuclear disaster.

The succession of court decisions has also raised questions about the way sufferers from the disaster are being compensated.

All the seven rulings so far, including on cases with TEPCO as the sole defendant, have awarded damages in excess of the amounts prescribed in the guidelines that have been set forth by a government committee. Despite differences in the content, appraisal and values of the damages acknowledged, the rulings indicate the government guidelines, along with TEPCO's compensation standards that are based thereon, have failed to address the reality of suffering that is at once diverse and serious.

TEPCO should listen carefully, in paying the damages, to the voices of every single disaster sufferer instead of insisting on its own reparation standards.

Tokyo also faces the question of how seriously it will work on relief efforts.

The government committee has said it has no immediate plans for reviewing its guidelines because the court decisions have yet to be finalized. But such a stance would be of little help toward fair and prompt relief measures.

It will take a long time before final court rulings are rendered. It would be sincere to start studying how the guidelines should be reviewed while monitoring the successive rulings to be delivered by the courts.

Worthy of particular consideration is a response to those who evacuated at their own discretion.

Many of the "voluntary evacuees" are only eligible to receive a total of 120,000 yen (\$1,150) according to TEPCO's standards, but some have won the right, through court proceedings, to receive millions of yen in damages.

One court ruling said it is in some cases deemed appropriate, in light of conventional wisdom, for people to evacuate for fear of the risks of radiation exposure even if they are not ordered by public administrative bodies to do so. Another court decision said the disaster violated the plaintiffs' right to decide for themselves where to live.

No small number of nuclear disaster evacuees have been distressed by prejudice and slander. Their circumstances may be diverse, but **each is a victim of Japan's nuclear energy policy.**

The government should take the lead in facing up to its own responsibility to ensure that the evacuees will be supported by the entire society.

Fukushima hamburgers in Tokyo

April 4, 2018

Hamburger event using Fukushima ingredients held in Tokyo

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180404/p2a/00m/0na/020000c>

A special event promoting homemade hamburgers using ingredients from Fukushima Prefecture recently took place in Tokyo's Shibuya Ward.

Roughly 30 people turned up on the occasion, where they sampled hamburgers containing fresh meat and vegetables produced in Fukushima Prefecture that were brought to the venue by young food-growing volunteers.

The event was organized by groups such as "Eat, and Energize the East," which strives to put Tohoku-grown food back on the map, and which was formed in the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011.

Yoshitaka Ono, 34, head of an agricultural support group called "Cool Agri" based in Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture, and 31-year-old Masamichi Egawa, who both reside in the prefecture, actively promoted locally grown ingredients at the event.

Ono runs an organic fruit farm, while Egawa focuses on growing potatoes and asparagus, in addition to trying to popularize a rare type of saffron that had traditionally been grown in Fukushima Prefecture. At the hamburger event on March 18, held in Tokyo's trendy Ebisu district, Ono provided a sauce processed from various fruits from his farm, and Egawa supplied saffron-rice buns made from his saffron. Adding the sauce and the buns to the meat and the tomatoes makes the hamburger "Instagrammable." A number of impressed participants took photos of the completed burgers with their smartphones before eating them.

In addition, Ono told the crowd about his barbeque area and beer garden situated in the middle of his apple fields, which is designed to bring producers and consumers together.

"The vegetables (in Fukushima Prefecture) retain key nutrients and develop a brilliant, slightly sweet taste. Being able to eat these products, which are not available in Tokyo, is our special privilege," Egawa said, as he spoke about the Tohoku region's method of growing vegetables such as Chinese cabbage in snowy conditions.

Erika Morikawa, a 23-year-old dietician who attended the event, said, "There's a tendency to dismiss the aftermath of 3.11 as a problem that doesn't concern you. However, after hearing the stories of people who are trying hard in Fukushima Prefecture, I've come to realize that I really want to cooperate for the area's reconstruction."

Starting school in Iwate Pref.

April 1, 2018

Post-disaster children start elementary school in Tohoku

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201804010030.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

OFUNATO, Iwate Prefecture--For the first time, all children who attended the entrance ceremony of an elementary school in this tsunami-hit coastal city were born after the 3/11 disaster.

The 15 youngsters may not have been around when the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami devastated coastal areas of the Tohoku region, but their parents were, and they recalled the horror and the compassion of that time.

"Many people extended a helping hand to us," said Wakako Tamura, 36. "I would like my son to return their kindness and consideration."

Her son, 6-year-old Momoharu, one of the newcomers to Ryori Elementary School, was born three months after the disaster when his parents were staying at their relatives' home in the city. The parents' own home was destroyed by the tsunami.

Wakako said she received baby formula and diapers in aid.

"I want to work hard to remember katakana and play baseball," Momoharu said.

Holding the entrance ceremony on April 1 has been a school tradition dating back to the prewar era.

Students started wearing kimono for the occasion in the 1970s.

The boys' kimono consists of a short Japanese overgarment called "haori" and a long pleated skirt called "hakama."

litate school reopens

April 6, 2018

Schools reopen in village of Fukushima

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20180406_36/

Children are returning to school in a village in Fukushima Prefecture for the first time since the March 2011 nuclear accident.

A new school building was constructed after authorities lifted an evacuation order for most of litate village in March last year.

75 elementary and junior high students will attend the school. 20 first-graders were welcomed at an entrance ceremony on Friday.

Junior high principal Setsuko Wada urged the students to be proactive and persevering.

Junior high freshman Manato Okabe said the students were happy to return to the warmth of a school in their hometown, and together they'll start a new tradition.

After the nuclear accident, children from litate took classes at temporary facilities outside the village.

litate authorities are waiving tuition fees and all other costs for the new school. They consider education to be a pillar of their plan to encourage former residents to return.

Most of the students still live outside litate. Many will spend more than one hour commuting on a school bus.

A junior high freshman said he's looking forward to the swimming class, which rarely took place at the temporary school. He said he also hopes to learn more about the village.

An elementary school 1st grader said he wants to play soccer with his friends.

Elementary and junior high schools have also reopened in the towns of Namie and Tomioka, following the lifting of evacuation orders for most areas in Fukushima last year.

But residents are not hurrying back. Namie had a population of about 21,000 before the nuclear accident. The figure is now about 500.

End of Fukushima arbitration case

April 6, 2018

Arbitration ends for Fukushima damages claim

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20180406_21/

A government body has given up trying to arbitrate between Tokyo Electric Power Company and more than 15,000 people seeking higher monthly compensation for the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

It was the largest arbitration case involving the nuclear accident.

Namie Town in Fukushima Prefecture filed a petition with the Nuclear Damage Compensation Dispute Resolution Center in 2013, on behalf of residents who were forced to evacuate after the disaster.

More than 15,000, or about 70 percent of the town's population, signed the petition to demand more compensation from TEPCO, the operator of the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

TEPCO's monthly payment for each Namie resident was calculated at 100,000 yen, or about 934 dollars. In March 2014, the dispute resolution center offered an arbitration plan that called for raising this amount by 50 percent. The town agreed to accept it.

But TEPCO maintains that increasing the compensation would have a significant impact on other evacuees. The center has repeatedly asked the utility to accept the plan.

On Friday, the dispute resolution center told the town of its decision to end the arbitration process.

The claimants are expected to consider whether to file a lawsuit against TEPCO. The town says more than 800 of the claimants are now dead.

Hopeful days ahead?

April 7, 2018

Photo Journal: Hopeful days ahead

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180407/p2a/00m/0na/010000c>

Students get high-fives as they walk through a "flower tunnel" during a ceremony marking the reopening of a municipal kindergarten, elementary school and junior high school in the village of Katsurao, Fukushima Prefecture, on April 6, 2018. This was the first time in seven years that a school building in the village had welcomed students, since the March 2011 Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster forced the evacuation of the villagers. Katsurao is one of five area municipalities where the national government has partially lifted evacuation orders and schools have reopened. However, there were just 22 children at the April 6 ceremony, or about 15 percent of the pre-disaster total. (Mainichi)

Blossoms and Spring festival in Fukushima Pref.

April 11, 2018

VOX POPULI: Fukushima town blossom festival marks a genuine spring of rebirth

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201804110027.html>

The extended branches of Yoshino cherry trees that line the streets of Tomioka in Fukushima Prefecture form canopy-like tunnels of pale pink blossoms.

This coming weekend, the Yonomori district of the town of Tomioka will hold its famed annual "Sakura Matsuri" (cherry blossom festival) for the first time in eight years.

The trees were planted during the third decade of the Meiji Era (1868-1912) by local citizens to commemorate the development of what used to be an expanse of wasteland.

The "cherry blossom tunnels" made Tomioka one of the top springtime tourist attractions in the Tohoku region. But the Fukushima nuclear disaster of 2011 changed everything.

The entire town was evacuated, and the festival had to be discontinued--until it was resumed under different names, one of which was "Fukko no Tsudoi" (a gathering for reconstruction).

But the familiar name of Sakura Matsuri is returning this spring, one year after the evacuation order was lifted for most parts of the town.

"Finally, we are able to hold the festival like it's meant to be," beamed Takeshi Owada, 65, who heads the festival's organizing committee.

In the aftermath of the nuclear disaster, Owada and his entire family evacuated temporarily to the city of Iwaki. But his signboard-making company is still in a zone designated as "difficult to return to."

Some of the cherry blossom tunnels are still behind barricades in an "off-limits" zone. I feel sorry for those flowers that will fall and die without being seen by anyone, even though they are no different from all other cherry trees that have graced the town for more than a century.

Around the nation, this year's unseasonably mild spring has rushed cherry blossoms into blooming early. In Tomioka, too, the harsh chills of winter have been replaced suddenly by the almost sweaty warmth of spring.

During my recent visit, I saw some locals "talking" to the trees, telling their swelling buds, "Don't bloom yet" and "Don't rush." These people want the trees to have as many blossoms left as possible for the festival.

This spring, children's voices and laughter are finally heard at Tomioka's just-reopened elementary and junior high schools. The municipal library is also back in business, and so is the local job placement agency.

Even when the cherry blossoms are past their peak, the Yonomori district will enable visitors to see the town's gradual recovery process. This is indeed the spring of rebirth for the community.

April 10, 2018

Spring festival returns to town that evacuated in nuke disaster

By KAZUMASA SUGIMURA/ Staff Writer

The highlight of the shinto ritual called "Hamakudari Shinji," dubbed "Tantan Peropero," is a purification ritual in which men carrying "mikoshi" portable shrines go around a small area in the shallows of the sea three times in Hirono, Fukushima Prefecture. (Kazumasa Sugimura)

HIRONO, Fukushima Prefecture--For the first time in eight years since the Fukushima nuclear disaster unfolded here in 2011, the happy sights and sounds of the spring festival dubbed "Tantan Peropero" returned to lift the spirits of residents.

High-spirited men clad in festive "happi" coats shouted "Wasshoi! Wasshoi!" and paraded through the town while shouldering a "mikoshi" portable shrine amid the playing of "taiko" drums on April 8.

The festival, which prays for an abundant harvest and good fortune, had been suspended after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, triggered the triple meltdown at the nearby Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The Tantan Peropero was named after the sound of Japanese traditional taiko drums and "fue" flutes, which used to be played in the Shinto ritual called "Hamakudari Shinji" that has been handed down at Kashimajinja shrine here.

Although the flutes are not played anymore during the ritual, the festival united the hopes of residents toward the town's recovery.

"I'm grateful that the solidarity of local people allowed the festival to begin again," said Masahito Nemoto, 71, a representative of the parishioners.

Along the streets, residents celebrated the return of the festival by clapping and cheering on the energetic 25 men, including mikoshi carriers, taiko players and those guiding the mikoshi carriers, and handed them monetary offerings.

The highlight of the festival is the "shiogori," which is a purification ritual based in the Shinto tradition held in the sea. Mikoshi carriers went down to the shore where waves were lapping about.

The energetic men chanted "Wasshoi! Wasshoi!" while entering the sea and marching around a small area in the shallows three times.

The area around the shrine was engulfed in the 2011 tsunami and an evacuation order was issued for the entire town after the nuclear accident.

A shortage of sufficient participants was a major concern for restarting the festival.

However, three employees of Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, and two third-year students from Futaba Future High School in Hirono assisted in the event.

Evacuation lifted but few return to school



Three first-graders gather at their classroom on April 6 in Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture, after a ceremony welcoming them to the elementary school. (Yosuke Fukudome)

April 7, 2018

Few return to Fukushima schools after evacuation lifted

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201804070024.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Near-empty classrooms marked the start of the new academic year in municipalities where evacuation orders dating from the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster were recently lifted.

Fourteen public elementary and junior high schools in five municipalities reopened their doors in April for the first time in seven years, but only 135 youngsters showed up.

The figure represents just 3 percent of the 4,000 or so children who were enrolled at 21 local schools prior to the disaster.

The low return rate highlights the daunting task for officials trying to revitalize local communities, given fears that an absence of children offers only murky prospects of survival.

Municipalities where evacuation orders were lifted refurbished school buildings and constructed new swimming pools and gymnasiums to attract more children.

Schools reopened in Namie, Tomioka, Iitate and the Yamakiya district of Kawamata, where evacuation orders were lifted in spring 2017 with the exception of difficult-to-return zones, as well as in Katsurao, where most of the village was deemed safe to return to in 2016.

Those municipalities had set up temporary schools at locations where many residents evacuated.

After the lifting of the evacuation orders, the percentage of residents who have returned to their former communities range from 3.5 percent in Namie to 33.9 percent in Kawamata.

Most of the returnees are senior citizens.

Younger residents apparently are reluctant to return due to lingering concerns about radiation and also because many have made a fresh start in the areas where they moved to after the disaster.

(This article was written by Hiroki Koizumi and Daiki Ishizuka.)

Fukushima as "a stage"



Hiroaki Shinmura is seen dressed as Zenigata Heiji, a period drama character, visiting the home of a 91-year-old patient in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, on Feb. 8, 2018. A nurse, right, is also wearing a period costume. (Mainichi)

April 11, 2018

Fukushima doctor visits elderly patients dressed as period drama characters

https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180411/p2a/00m/0na/010000c#cxrecs_s

IWAKI, Fukushima -- A hospital director here has taken to visiting elderly patients dressed as period drama characters in an attempt to cheer them up.

Hiroaki Shinmura, 50, head of Tokiwakai Joban Hospital, tends to dress as the Zenigata Heiji character, an Edo-period policeman, when he makes his visits, but is happy to switch to other characters such as Toyama no Kin-san and Mito Komon in response to patients' requests.

Female nurses also dress up and accompany Shinmura, as he tries to fulfill his dream of creating a community in which "elderly people would like to live."

The prefectural city of Iwaki was heavily affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011. In the aftermath of the disaster, water and electricity at Joban Hospital stopped running, putting the hospital under immense pressure. The number of dialysis patients at the hospital, which was about 700, was the largest in Fukushima Prefecture at the time.

A few years later, around 2015, Shinmura kicked off his costumed home visits, which he conducts once a month.

In one of his more recent visits, he went to the Iwaki home of a woman in her 80s, dressed as Zenigata Heiji and carrying the appropriate props -- bringing a smile to the woman's face as she greeted him at the door.

"How's your condition?" Shinmura asked the woman. "The color of your face is healthy," he told the woman's husband, who jokingly replied, "The afterlife is full up. Apparently they don't want us yet," adding, "Your visits somehow manage to cheer us up."

In the aftermath of 3.11, it became impossible to provide dialysis to patients at Joban Hospital, each of whom required the treatment three times a week. Shinmura took action and asked the Fukushima Prefectural Government as well as medical institutions across the prefecture to help out. However, the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster had put the entire prefecture in a state of confusion, prompting Shinmura to seek help in other prefectures. In the end, institutions and local governments in Tokyo, Chiba and Niigata prefectures accepted the dialysis patients and their relatives, and all the patients were saved.

The sight of the relieved patients was a turning point in Shinmura's life. "I came to realize that life is transient and that infrastructure, which I previously considered to be very robust, is in fact fragile. It made me think that if there's anything that can be done now, I should do it immediately."

In late March 2011, Shinmura returned to Joban Hospital and examined a considerable number of patients including those who had evacuated from their homes following the power plant disaster. He noticed that there was a sadness and lack of vitality in the patients' expressions. The number of patients with mobility issues increased, perhaps due to a reluctance to venture outside because of radiation fears, raising demand for home visits.

However, he noticed that visiting patients' homes in white coats was not conducive to frank conversation, because it felt like they were at the hospital. Then one day, Shinmura had a "eureka" moment. He appeared in a period costume for an event for inpatients, who seemed delighted by the sight, and Shinmura slapped his knee, saying, "This is it!"

The realization prompted him to purchase kimonos, wigs and props from a firm specializing in stage costumes. He then got into character and discovered that visiting elderly patients' homes dressed as Zenigata Heiji put the patients at ease and led to them talking about events in their daily lives. It also helped Shinmura understand his patients' concerns, joys and lifestyle habits.

Around New Year's, Shinmura tends to dress as the god of wealth, Daikokusama. When plum flowers blossom, he goes for Mito Komon and when cherry blossoms emerge, he opts for Toyama no Kin-san. In

total, there are no fewer than 50 characters in his repertoire, which includes fairytale characters such as Kintaro.

In the aftermath of the Kumamoto Earthquake, in April 2016, Shinmura sent backup staff to clinics in the city of Kumamoto, partly to repay his gratitude for the support he received for his dialysis patients after the 3.11 disaster.

Even as this interview is taking place, Shinmura is on his way to do another home visit dressed in character. "Take care," say hospital staff members and patients with a smile, as he heads for another period drama-style visit.

(Japanese original by Shinichi Kurita, Tokyo Regional News Department)

Overnighting in Fukushima

April 12, 2018

Fukushima town to allow overnight stays for 1st time since nuke plant meltdowns

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180412/p2a/00m/0na/018000c>

OKUMA, Fukushima -- Citizens of one part of this town in the Fukushima nuclear disaster evacuation zone will be able to return home for overnight stays beginning on April 24, the municipal government decided on April 11.

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The stays -- the first in either Okuma or the town of Futaba, cohosts of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant - - are in preparation for the eventual lifting of the nuclear evacuation order. They will mark the first time since the March 2011 triple-meltdown at the plant that Okuma citizens will be permitted to stay in their homes overnight.

The eased rules will apply to two of the town's districts: Ogawara, already a "restricted residency" zone with annual accumulated radiation doses more than 20 millisieverts and less than 50 millisieverts; and Nakayashiki, an "evacuation order cancellation preparation" zone with annual doses less than 20 millisieverts. Together, the districts make up Okuma's "recovery base," but with 379 people in 139 households, they make up just 3.6 percent of the town's pre-disaster population.

The scheduled opening this month of a new hospital in neighboring Tomioka played a part in the Okuma town government's decision, as the facility guarantees emergency medical care will be available nearby.

The central government is aiming to lift the evacuation order for both the Ogawara and Nakayashiki districts by the time the Okuma municipal government has finished its new town hall in spring 2019.

Okuma Mayor Toshitsuna Watanabe said, "We have finally come this far. We will make an effort to create better conditions for residents to return home through 'recovery bases.'"

(Japanese original by Seiichi Yuasa, Fukushima Bureau)

Compensation, mental pain and resentment

April 13, 2018

Tepco's compensation for 3/11 victims has made matters worse for many

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/04/13/national/tepcos-compensation-3-11-victims-made-matters-worse-many/#.WtHv638uCos>

by Philip Brasor and Masako Tsubuku

Contributing Writers

As of the end of March, Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc. had paid more than ¥8 trillion in compensation (*baishōkin*) related to the Fukushima No. 1 reactor meltdowns of March 2011. About half of this money has gone to people living near the crippled reactors for “mental anguish” and the other half has gone to businesses whose livelihoods were destroyed or otherwise diminished by the disaster.

The payouts officially ended at the end of March, but Tepco is by no means out of the woods. There are numerous lawsuits against the company demanding additional compensation, and the central government has issued ¥13.5 trillion in bonds for interest-free loans to Tepco that are supposed to cover a wide range of expenses related to effects on residents and cleanup activities.

Tepco is supposed to pay back this money by 2051, and until then it's estimated that the government will have to pay bondholders more than ¥218 billion in interest — that is, if interest rates stay the same. This money, of course, will be covered by taxpayers.

In the years since Tepco started paying the compensation in Oct. 2011, a large group of people have therefore become dependent on it for their survival, and there is some concern regarding what this dependency will mean in the future.

As Toshiro Kitamura, a former director of Japan Atomic Power Co., told the Asahi Shimbun in an interview published on March 7, the people who were forced to move out of their homes, as well as many who moved voluntarily, were compensated for mental anguish (*seishin songai*) and loss of property, but the decision to pay compensation as well as the amounts paid were decided unilaterally by other people, namely Tepco and the government. People's emotional pain, he said, was “summarized” and all treated in the same way with fixed cash payments.

No effort was made to distinguish one victim's specific situation from another's. If someone objected to the amount through legal channels, they were likely to get more. Now these payments, or, at least, the first phase of these payments, are finished, but the pain, he says, remains. He should know. He was among those forced to evacuate.

The Asahi interviewer brings up the notion that the compensation actually made matters worse. People lost their living situations, which were then replaced with money.

Kitamura says that communities have been destroyed twice, once by the accident and again by the compensation, which has sown “jealousy and discontent,” giving rise to social divisions, and not just in the affected areas.

Evacuees face discrimination wherever they live due mainly to the well-publicized money they receive. He mentions that the seven years of payments for mental anguish amounted to about ¥8.5 million per person, but Tepco has also determined that about 25,000 people from some areas that remain off-limits will get an additional one-time payment of ¥7 million each.

However, if the address of your former dwelling is outside this arbitrarily delineated area, you get nothing extra, which means, theoretically, that you could live across the street from someone who received this bonus.

Tepco loses nothing, essentially, since the government is loaning them money for free and the utility has added a special surcharge to electricity bills to cover cleanup and other expenses.

Everyone knows Tepco is paying for the accident — about ¥10.2 trillion altogether so far — and will be paying for it for years to come, but people’s resentment is just as likely aimed at those who receive compensation.

There are no rules as to how these people can spend their money, which is not taxed, and so rumors spread about evacuees gambling or taking extravagant trips, and the resentment grows.

The payment for mental anguish was a very round ¥100,000 a month per person, so a family of five received ¥6 million a year. However, they could also receive payments to cover loss of property or employment, as well as reimbursement for things like transportation and housing if they rent, so the money could end up being much more.

In many cases, compensation ended when evacuation orders were lifted, for some districts as early as 2014, and in principle payments would stop for evacuees from these areas. But if they decided not to move back, they could probably still receive money.

Rent reimbursements were also supposed to stop in March, but the government has asked Tepco to continue providing funds for rent for at least another year.

Also, if the evacuees had a business affected by the accident, like a farm, they would get extra money as well.

There is even a form of compensation paid to current agricultural and forestry producers — who by definition are not evacuees — whose livelihoods have been damaged by “rumors” of radioactivity, meaning they can’t sell their goods even though they are not contaminated as far as the authorities are concerned.

According to the March 4 online edition of the Kahoku Shimpō, a Miyagi Prefecture newspaper, the return rate for residents of nine different areas whose evacuation orders were lifted a year ago varies widely, from a low of 3.3 percent to a high of 80.1 percent. The average return rate for the nine areas is only 15.3 percent.

According to NHK, 80 percent of the estimated 39,000 evacuees who moved outside of Fukushima Prefecture have not returned to their original areas of residence as of March.

Some local governments are spending money to lure new residents, since they don’t expect a lot of the old ones to come back. Tomioka offers new families with children ¥300,000, plus ¥180,000 per child per year for the first three years.

The reason former residents aren’t coming back is that, while the evacuation order was lifted and the area is considered safe, infrastructure is not back up to speed. Also, many of the evacuees are old.

Voluntary evacuees also received payments to cover rents in the places they moved to. For mental anguish they received a one-time payment of ¥120,000 (¥720,000 for persons under 19 and pregnant women).

These payments stopped a year ago.

However, whenever evacuees sue Tepco for more compensation, they usually win. Last month, the Iwaki branch of the Fukushima District Court told Tepco to pay ¥610 million to 213 former residents of two Fukushima towns. (They had asked for ¥13 billion.) A Tokyo District Court in February awarded ¥1.1 billion to 318 people from Minamisoma, or about ¥3.2 million per plaintiff.

Probably the trickiest form of financial redress is for real estate. People who had to move or decided to move negotiate with Tepco to buy their old property at market value, but land in some zones is practically worthless, while the value of land in areas being redeveloped has gone way up in price due to demand. So as the initial compensation period comes to a close for the time being, it’s important, as Kitamura suggests in the Asahi interview, to note that matters have not returned to the way they were at all, and

they never will. That means the people affected will still need and demand and expect money from the government and Tepco. These people believe that their hometowns have been changed, perhaps ruined, forever, even those who decided to return and try to pick up where they left off. “It wasn’t just their losses that were monetized,” Kitamura says. “It was their stress as well. As a result, they’ve become very sensitive about money, and will never stop saying, ‘It’s not enough.’”

New hospital opened in Fukushima

April 23, 2018

Patients visit new hospital near Fukushima plant

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20180423_15/

A new hospital has opened in a town near the damaged nuclear power plant in Fukushima Prefecture. It started accepting patients on Monday.

People in the Futaba region have not had a hospital with 24-hour services, including surgery, since the 2011 nuclear disaster.

The new 2-story Futaba Medical Center in the town of Tomioka has 30 beds for inpatients. The internal and emergency departments have 21 doctors working in shifts around the clock.

Patients can be airlifted from the heliport to other hospitals when advanced care is required.

The hospital will send medical staff to patients' homes if necessary. It will also offer classes on ways to keep healthy. These services are expected to help evacuees who return to live in the area.

The hospital is about 10 kilometers from the Fukushima Daiichi plant, where decommissioning work continues.

The director, Choichiro Tase, says the hospital will provide medical support to ensure the safety and security of local residents and plant workers.

High-tech reserach facilities for Fukushima

April 25, 2018

High-tech hub planned to aid Fukushima recovery

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20180425_32/

The Japanese government and Fukushima Prefecture are planning to build high-tech research facilities, including testing areas for drones and robots, in the coming 3 years to aid the area's recovery.

The prefecture is home to the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

The government and Fukushima Prefecture plan to turn the coastal area near the plant into a high-tech hub. This is part of efforts to reconstruct the prefecture, which was affected by the 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster.

The plan was adopted at a meeting of Cabinet ministers on Wednesday.

It calls for turning a total of 55 hectares of land in Minamisoma City and Namie Town into a testing ground for robots and drones. Some of the robots are intended for use in disaster relief.

Namie will also be the site of a factory to produce hydrogen, a next-generation energy source. Once completed, it will be one of the largest of its kind in the world.

Research and development facilities involved in the decommissioning of nuclear reactors will be built in the town of Okuma and elsewhere.

Fukushima flower maze

April 28, 2018

Flower maze opens in tsunami-hit district

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20180428_12/

Families and children are getting themselves lost in a giant maze of rapeseed flowers that has opened in Fukushima Prefecture, northeastern Japan.

The maze began operating on Saturday in the Kaibama district of Minamisoma City, ahead of the Golden Week string of holidays.

The area was devastated by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami. Seventy-seven people died.

Residents and volunteers have built the flower labyrinth every year since the disaster. This year's site covers 2.2 hectares -- nearly 3 times bigger than last year.

The maze has 2 levels of difficulty. Shortly after opening, children were seen running among the rows of yellow flowers, as tall as themselves.

One boy said he got completely lost but enjoyed it. He said the flowers were pretty.

Takayuki Ueno is the project organizer. He lost 4 family members in the tsunami.

Ueno said that after the disaster, residents could only cry with sorrow. He believes the deceased will be looking on happily at the smiles of those enjoying the maze.

The maze remains open until May 6th.

Seven years later

<https://www.facebook.com/DiaNuke.org/videos/1772552876101018/>

Roads should not be built with contaminated material



April 29, 2018

Plastic bags filled with radioactive soil are placed in temporary storage in Nihonmatsu, Fukushima Prefecture, in October. | KYODO

Fukushima residents fight state plan to build roads with radiation-tainted soil

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/04/29/national/fukushima-residents-fight-state-plan-build-roads-radiation-tainted-soil/#.WuqtVX8uCos>

Kyodo

FUKUSHIMA – The Environment Ministry plans to use radiation-tainted soil to build roads in Fukushima Prefecture, starting with trials in the city of Nihonmatsu next month.

But in the face of fierce protests from safety-minded residents, the ministry is struggling to advance the plan.

“Don’t scatter contaminated soil on roads,” one resident yelled during a Thursday briefing by Environment Ministry officials in Nihonmatsu.

The officials repeatedly tried to soothe them with safety assurances, but to no avail.

“Ensuring safety is different from having the public feeling at ease,” said Bunsaku Takamiya, a 62-year-old farmer who lives near a road targeted for the plan. He claims the project will produce groundless rumors that nearby farm produce is unsafe.

Seven years after the March 2011 core meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, Takamiya has finally been able to ship his produce in Fukushima without worry. Then the ministry’s soil plan surfaced. A woman in the neighborhood agrees.

“The nature and air here are assets for the residents. I don’t want them to take it away from us,” she said. Under the plan, tainted soil will be buried under a 200-meter stretch of road in the city. The soil, packed in black plastic bags, has been sitting in temporary storage.

The plan is to take about 500 cu. meters of the soil, bury it under the road at a depth of 50 cm or more, cover it with clean soil to block radiation, and pave over it with asphalt. The ministry intends to take measurements for the project in May.

Fukushima is estimated to have collected about 22 million cu. meters of tainted soil at most. The ministry plans to put it in temporary storage before transporting it to a final disposal site outside the prefecture. The idea is to reduce the amount. The ministry thus intends to use soil with cesium emitting a maximum of 8,000 becquerels per kg in public works projects nationwide.

The average radiation level for soil used for road construction is estimated at about 1,000 becquerels per kg, the ministry says.

The ministry has already conducted experiments to raise ground levels in Minamisoma with the tainted soil, saying “a certain level” of safety was confirmed.

Similar plans are on the horizon regarding landfill to be used for gardening in the village of Iitate. But it is first time it will be used in a place where evacuations weren’t issued after the March 2011 meltdowns. Given the protests, an official linked to the ministry said, “It’s difficult to proceed as is.”

The Fukushima legacy

May 10, 2018

The Fukushima legacy: more than just cancer, diabetes diagnoses have increased six-fold

<https://www.nexusnewsfeed.com/article/geopolitics/the-fukushima-legacy-more-than-just-cancer-diabetes-diagnoses-have-increased-six-fold/>

It’s not a secret that nuclear radiation is dangerous: Not only does it cause cancer, even seemingly small amounts of the stuff can be lethal. Exposure to high enough levels can be deadly in frighteningly short periods of time. But for the survivors of the Fukushima disaster, and those living in surrounding areas, radiation and cancer aren’t the only health concerns. New research has shown that in communities nearest the power plant, cases of type 2 diabetes are on the rise.

Researchers have been analyzing the secondary health effects of the nuclear disaster, which took place seven years ago now. Dr. Masaharu Tsubokura, from the Department of Radiation Protection at Minamisoma Municipal General Hospital in Fukushima, has been working alongside other researchers to better understand the full scope of Fukushima’s health consequences. Their findings indicate both an

increase in the number of cases, and a rise in severity of, health conditions like diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity and depression.

Dr. Tsubokura says that the social disruption caused by the evacuation has played an under-reported role on public health. As the research reveals, the elderly in particular have been hardest hit by the disaster — especially when it comes to diabetes. In the wake of Fukushima, “diabetes trumps radiation as a threat to life expectancy by a factor of 33,” sources say.

This is not to say that diabetes is more dangerous than radiation — but the finding shows that the number of people being afflicted by diabetes post-disaster is surprisingly high. The risk of type 2 diabetes, and poor diabetes management, as an indirect effect of the nuclear spill is substantial.

More than just a disrupted lifestyle?

The 2017 research paper highlights the fact that the effects of such disasters extend far beyond the acute: Indirect health issues abound after such an extreme disruption to normal life. But, is that really the only explanation?

Dr. Vivian Fonseca, assistant dean for clinical research at Tulane University in New Orleans reported similar effects in her post-Hurricane Katrina research. She noted that diabetes management “goes haywire” during the aftermath of a disaster — and the condition is heavily influenced by lifestyle factors like diet and exercise. The social stress of an evacuation and potential social isolation also weigh quite heavily on people who’ve already been diagnosed with the condition.

Scientists say the full scope of health ramifications is difficult to accurately ascertain; it’s hard to say what the mediating factors are (outside of the radiation, of course). But, that hasn’t stopped the Japanese government from wanting to build roads out of radioactive Fukushima dirt.

Some research from the Ukraine has documented a staggering increase in cases of diabetes and other non-cancer endocrine disorders. Even 30 years after the Chernobyl power plant incident, increased cases of diabetes and other conditions in survivors are still being documented. Scientists from the Ukraine reported in 2017 that levels of diabetes in radiation-exposed survivors (including site clean-up workers) remain noticeably higher than the rest of the population.

This finding could raise questions about the purported increase of diabetes in Fukushima survivors. While scientists say that this increase is due to the massive social disruption caused by the evacuation, one might wonder if there’s more to it than that. As the Ukrainian scientists note, research has shown that the endocrine system may be more affected by exposure to radiation than previously thought, especially the pancreas.

The idea that an increase in diabetes could be related to radiation exposure and not just lifestyle changes alone isn’t all that far-fetched, is it?

Sources for this article include:

Ozy.com

Endocrine-Abstracts.org

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China may ease restrictions on Japanese food

May 10, 2018

Fukushima hopeful as China mulls easing of import curbs

<http://www.the-japan-news.com/news/article/0004429650>

The Yomiuri Shimbun

Japan and China will start talks toward China easing its import restrictions on Japanese food products imposed after the accident at Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings, Inc.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the two nations agreed at a summit meeting in Tokyo on Wednesday.

Seven years after the 2011 accident, products from Fukushima Prefecture are still viewed with suspicion by some countries. Local producers in Fukushima Prefecture and government officials have high hopes that China will open its markets.

"I feel like I've been waiting for this," said Hideharu Ota, 57, president of Daishichi Sake Brewery Co. in Nihonmatsu, Fukushima Prefecture. "I want to promote Fukushima products with our sake and help improve the image of the areas affected by the earthquake," he added.

The long-established sake brewery had planned to export its products to China, but that stalled due to the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake. Currently, the brewery exports sake products to 20 countries in areas such as North America and Europe.

Ota has high expectations for China's lifting of import restrictions, saying, "China's large market is attractive."

In the wake of the nuclear power plant accident, 54 countries and regions imposed import restrictions against Japanese food products. Currently, 27 countries and regions still impose such restrictions, and China has halted imports of all food products from 10 prefectures, including Fukushima.

About 210 tons of agricultural products from Fukushima Prefecture were exported in fiscal 2017, more than the 153 tons in fiscal 2010 before the disaster. But the fiscal 2017 exports were mainly to Malaysia and Thailand, which lifted import restrictions, while shipments to East Asia have been sluggish because countries and regions in the area have yet to lift their restrictions.

"If the Chinese market opens up, it may have a positive impact on surrounding countries and regions," said an official of the prefectural government's division concerning strategies to promote local products.

Some nations still take a harsh position on products from Fukushima Prefecture.

In March, Russia lifted import restrictions on marine products from six prefectures, including Iwate, but requires the submission of a certificate related to radioactive materials for marine products from Fukushima. In May, the United Arab Emirates made the submission of a certificate unnecessary when importing other Japanese food products, but still requires a certificate for Fukushima products.

There are also cases of harm caused by misinformation.

In 2015, Thailand lifted import restrictions except for wild game meat. In March this year, exports of marine products from Fukushima started. But local consumer groups opposed a promotional event for raw fish from Fukushima that was held in Bangkok, saying the products were contaminated.

Partly because the incident was reported by media outlets, the event was canceled, followed by the cancellation of the exports themselves.

"Even though a country lifts restrictions, what comes next is harm caused by misinformation. Consumers reacted much more sensitively than expected," said a person involved in the exports of the marine products at a trading company.

An official at the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Ministry's Office for Relaxing Overseas' Import Regulations said: "There are some countries where a bad image remains, with the word Fukushima equated with the nuclear power plant. The Japanese government intends to claim the safety [of Fukushima products] and seek the understanding on it." Speech

Back to normal?

May 16, 2018

Seven Years Later, Class is Back in Session

<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/nhknewsline/reinvigoratingtohoku/sevenyearslaterclassisback/>
- Rodrigue Maillard

Many municipalities affected by the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident are on the way to recovery. The village of Iitate is one of them.

The evacuation order for most of the village was lifted last year and a new school opened this spring. Residents believe the opening marks a turning point in their town's revival.

The villagers of Iitate are celebrating the opening of the brand new school. Three elementary schools and a junior high school were combined into one facility. It cost about 32 million dollars.

75 students will attend classes here. This is the first time since the accident that children have gathered at a school in the village.

"I am so grateful for the support we've received from so many people over the past seven years," says a student. "During that time, I always hoped to return to Iitate. I am very moved to be here for the opening of the school."

Seven years ago, radiation leaked from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant after a huge tsunami hit the area.

The entire population of Iitate was forced to evacuate. About 2,300 families moved to neighboring towns and villages. Authorities set up temporary schools outside the village.

The leaders of Iitate have been looking forward to the opening of the new school for a long time. It is the pillar of their plan to encourage former residents to return. A lot of effort went into convincing the families.

The village covers all student expenses: school uniforms, books, meals, and even fees for trips.

"A community without a school has no future," says Norio Kanno, the mayor of Iitate. "I think the key to the village's recovery is to bring back as many children as possible, and fill the village with their voices. That's the way to restore the village."

Many homes in the village remain vacant. Only 10 percent of the residents have returned. Most of the returnees are elderly people.

"There is little human interaction in the village, and I feel lonely," says one villager. "It's sad. There are hardly any families."

School buses arrive early in the morning to pick up the children outside the village. Most children commute for one hour or more.

"I take a nap or look out the window," says one student. "I'm sleepy, so I don't talk with the other kids."

"It's all right," says another. "I'm trying my best because I know I will be able to see my friends."

The Takahashis and their two children live in Fukushima City. They bought a house two years ago and have settled into urban life.

But their son, Yamato, insists on going to the village school. He doesn't want to be separated from the friends he made at the temporary school, even if it means a long commute.

"It's not us but our son who is going to the school," says Yamato's mother, Miyuki. "In the end, we decided it's important to respect his decision."

This was not an easy decision for most of the families. A third of the parents whose children attended the temporary schools decided not to send their kids to the new school.

One child's family, though, has been eagerly waiting for the school to open.

Riku Watanabe, a second grader, came here with his elder sister. His parents had enrolled him in a school close to their new home in Fukushima City. But Riku wasn't able to cope with the new environment.

"Many students had attended cram schools, and the pace of the lessons was so fast," his father Kenji says. "My son started saying he didn't enjoy school anymore."

Riku was unable to make any friends. He often failed to hand in his homework. The family says his teacher punished him.

"He was forced to study in the hall outside the classroom," says his elder sister Rin. "I felt bad for my brother. He's a really good kid, but he would get punished almost every day. It would have been better if it had only happened once a week."

For Riku and his family, the new school was a relief. But they still have concerns.

The authorities announced that the decontamination of the residential areas is complete. But there are still thousands of bags of radioactive waste in the village, and it may be decades before they can be removed.

Just before entering the school, Riku and Rin underwent an annual medical examination to check for the possible effects of radiation exposure.

"It looks like my kids are OK for now," says their mother, Misaki. "But good mental health is also very important. I hope my children can find peace of mind at the village school."

Many villagers believe the school could be the seed that brings its lost community back to life. But there is still a long way to go before the children and their families can once again call Iitate their home.

Please listen to us children



"When they called me a 'germ' I wanted to die"

Posted on May 13, 2018 by [beyondnuclearinternational](#)

But Fukushima boy fought back, helping win a court victory that brought compensation for evacuees from the nuclear disaster

On October 25, 2017, 15-year old former Fukushima resident Natsuki Kusano (not his real name and he has asked not to be pictured) testified before the Tokyo District Court. He was among a number of Fukushima evacuees seeking compensation from Tepco and the Japanese government and asking the court to hold the company and the government responsible for the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

As reported by the Asahi Shimbun, on March 16, 2018, the Tokyo District Court found the central government and TEPCO responsible for contributing to the psychological stress suffered by 42 evacuees and ordered the defendants to pay a total of about 60 million yen (\$566,000) in compensation.

The lawsuit was filed by 47 individuals in 17 households who fled from Fukushima Prefecture to Tokyo in the wake of the nuclear disaster. Significantly, 46 of those individuals evacuated voluntarily from areas where no evacuation order was issued by the government.

When the verdict came down, Natsuki was in Geneva with his mother and other women who were there to urge the Japanese government to abide by the UN recommendation of a 1 millisievert per year radiation exposure level. The Japanese authorities had raised this level to an unacceptable 20 msv per year in order to justify ordering people to return to affected areas or risk losing their compensation.

This was the sixth ruling so far among at least 30 similar law suits filed in Japan. Four rulings have held the central government liable for the nuclear disaster and ordered it to pay compensation.

The plaintiffs believe that Natsuki's declaration played an important role in the victory. Here is what he said:

Life in Iwaki

I was born in Iwaki city, Fukushima. I lived there with my parents and my little brother who is younger than me by 5 years.

While we were in Iwaki, we enjoyed our life season by season. When spring came, we appreciated cherry blossoms at "the Night Forest Park", which was famous for its marvelous row of cherry trees that lots of people also know about well through the TV. In summer we went gathering shellfish. We had a fun time hunting wild mushrooms in fall and made a snowman in winter.

In a park or on my way home from school, I picked a lot of *tsukushi* (stalks of field-horsetail). My mother simmered them in soy and made *tsukudani*, which we loved very much. We lived in a big house with a large garden where we grew blueberries, *shiitake* mushrooms and cherry tomatoes. At school I collected insects and made mud pies with my friends.

Life after the Accident

But we have lost these happy days after March 11, 2011. The Night Forest Park is located in the "difficult-to-return zone". We can't make pies with mud fully contaminated by radioactivity. However, the worst of it was that I was bullied at a school I transferred to.

Some put cruel notes on my work in an art class, others called me a germ. These distressing days continued a long time and I began to wish to die if possible. Once when I was around 10 years old, I wrote on a wishing card on the Star Festival, "I want to go to Heaven."

Perhaps those who have no way of knowing anything about evacuees see us as "cheating people". They might think that the evacuees from Fukushima got great compensation and live in shelters in Tokyo for free with no damage at home.

I believe that these misunderstandings would not have happened if the government and TEPCO (Tokyo Electric Power Company) had told the truth about the horrible reality of radioactive contamination and had provided accurate information to the public: they have hardly paid any compensation to the extramural evacuees. (*Note: these are the evacuees who fled from areas outside of the official evacuation*

zone. Because they left without the evacuation order, the government considers them “voluntary” evacuees who are therefore not entitled to compensation. In its verdict, the Tokyo district court recognized the rights of these self-evacuees.)

I have not revealed that I am an evacuee at my junior high school which has no relations with the former school, and actually I have not been bullied ever since.

What I wish adults to bear the blame for

It is adults who made the nuclear power plants. It is adults who profited from them. It is adults who caused the nuclear accident. But it is us children who are bullied, live with a fear of becoming sick and are forced apart from families.

After the accident, no one can say that a nuclear plant is safe anymore.

In fact, no one can say to me, “Don’t worry, you’ll never be sick.”

Nevertheless, the government and TEPCO say “Rest easy, trust us. Your home town is safe now,” and make us return to the place which is not safe.

I suspect that the adults who forced us to go back to the dangerous zone will be dead and not here when we are grown-up and become sick. Isn’t that terrible? We have to live with contaminants all through our life which adults caused. I am afraid that it is too selfish of them to die without any liability. While they are alive in this world, I strongly request them to take responsibility for what they did and what they polluted in return for their profits at least.

And now, please, please don’t force us go back to the contaminated place. We never ever want to do so.

The nuclear accidents changed all the lives of the evacuees as well as mine, my parents’ and my brother’s. Who wanted this? None of us. The evacuees all agree that the government and TEPCO should take responsibility.

Court of justice, please listen to us children and all the evacuees.

Rising costs of nursing care insurance (in Fukushima)

May 22, 2018

Nursing care insurance premium rises to average 5,869 yen for FY2018-2020

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180522/p2a/00m/0na/015000c>

TOKYO -- The Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare announced on May 21 that the average monthly premium for nursing care insurance that elderly people will pay for fiscal 2018 through 2020 is 5,869 yen, up 6.4 percent from the previous period and doubling from when the program was introduced.

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The rise in the long-term care insurance premium comes amid the ever-increasing use of nursing care services in a rapidly aging society.

According to the ministry, those aged 65 or older are to pay a monthly national average of 5,869 yen for nursing care insurance premiums in fiscal 2018-2020, up 355 yen from the previous FY2015-2017 period. Municipalities across the country review the insurance premiums every three years based on the projected volumes of nursing care services to be provided, which are then tallied by the health ministry. While the number of people recognized to require nursing care or assistance stood at 2.56 million in fiscal

2000 when the nursing care insurance system was introduced, the figure for such people shot up to 6.4 million by February this year. Accordingly, the national average monthly nursing care insurance premium has doubled from the initial 2,911 yen in FY2000.

The nursing care insurance premium is expected to further rise over the coming years, to somewhere between 6,800 yen and 7,200 yen in fiscal 2025 and between 8,600 yen and 9,200 yen in fiscal 2040, according to the ministry's estimate.

By municipality, 1,224 local bodies (78 percent) raised the insurance premium from that for the previous three-year period, while 256 other bodies (16.3 percent) kept the fees unchanged and 90 bodies (5.7 percent) lowered the premium.

The village of Katsurao in nuclear disaster-hit Fukushima Prefecture stood out for its highest premium at 9,800 yen a month. Among the 11 towns and villages ranked in the top 10 for their high nursing care insurance premiums, seven are situated in Fukushima Prefecture. The other six Fukushima municipalities in the top 10 are: the town of Futaba (8,976 yen), the town of Okuma (8,500 yen), the town of Namie (8,400 yen), the village of Iitate (8,297 yen), the town of Mishima (8,000 yen) and the village of Kawauchi (8,000 yen).

Meanwhile, the village of Otoineppu in the northernmost prefecture of Hokkaido ranked at the bottom for its lowest premium of 3,000 yen. In 1,150 municipalities (about 70 percent), insurance premiums stood within the range of 5,001 yen to 6,500 yen.

Among the seven Fukushima Prefecture municipalities that ranked in the top 10 for their high insurance premiums, six were subject to evacuation orders in the wake of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster. The high premiums in those local bodies are believed to have been triggered by deteriorating health conditions among elderly residents due to the prolonged evacuations, among other factors. While residents in those areas are exempt from insurance premium payments in principle under the national government's special measure, local municipalities are growing wary of how long the exemption will continue.

The evacuation order was lifted in June 2016 for most parts of the village of Katsurao, whose insurance premium stood the highest among all municipalities. As of May 1 this year, there were 530 people aged 65 or older in the village, accounting for nearly 40 percent of the 1,430 registered population. Among them, 157 people have been recognized to require nursing care or assistance.

"Due to the prolonged evacuations, residents tend to develop poor health conditions more often than before," said a representative of the Katsurao Municipal Government's resident life division. "Over the course of their evacuation, the trend toward nuclear families progressed and elderly households increased, forcing them to have no choice but to rely on nursing care services."

The Fukushima Prefecture village of Iitate ranked eighth with a monthly insurance premium of 8,297 yen, down from the second place it took in the previous period. While the evacuation order was lifted for most parts of the village in March last year, only about 14 percent of its registered residents, or 794 people, have returned to the village to live, with over half of them aged 65 or older. "If the insurance premium becomes more expensive while the special exemption is abolished, our nursing care services could collapse," lamented a representative of the Iitate Municipal Government's health and welfare division. Hideo Takahashi, a 68-year-old local farmer, said, "Even if the national government's assistance is terminated, I can get by with my income, but other elderly people who cannot work would be in hell. Unless the Fukushima Prefectural Government and the Iitate Municipal Government provide assistance, the weak will just be discarded."

The Fukushima Prefectural Government is set to request the central government to continue the insurance premium exemption system for elderly residents and aims to curb insurance fees by stepping

up efforts to prevent residents from requiring nursing care in collaboration with municipalities hosting nuclear evacuees.

"We will strive to make sure that those in need can properly receive nursing care services," said an official of the prefectural government.

The health ministry is set to release its tallies of nursing care insurance premiums by municipality and other related information on its website.

(Japanese original by Hiroyuki Harada, Medical Welfare News Department, Toshiki Miyazaki and Hideyuki Kakinuma, Fukushima Bureau)

Cattle again in Fukushima

May 24, 2018

Cattle return to graze in Fukushima village for 1st time since nuke plant meltdowns

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180524/p2a/00m/0na/009000c>

IITATE, Fukushima -- Farmers began tests on having their cattle graze here on May 23 for the first time since the March 2011 triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

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The national government lifted the nuclear evacuation order in most parts of the village at the end of March 2017.

While about 220 farmers bred beef cattle before the nuclear disaster, just five farmers restarted their breeding after the ban was lifted. The test will last over three months, and the farmers will check the level of radiation in the cattle's blood and conduct other checks with the aim to return to regular grazing in 2019 or later.

Farmer Takeshi Yamada, 69, who had six of his beef cows graze on the green grass, commented, "Grazing is less stressful than breeding in barns. It makes it possible to produce fresh beef." Yamada will strive to revive the local "Iitate Beef Cattle" brand.

(Japanese original by Rikka Teramachi, Fukushima Bureau)

Fukushima mothers tell their story



May 28, 2018

Fukushima mothers at UN tell their story

<https://beyondnuclearinternational.org/2018/05/28/fukushima-mothers-at-un-tell-their-story/>

Posted on May 28, 2018 by beyondnuclearinternational

Evacuees from nuclear disaster urge the Japanese government to comply with UN Human Rights standards

By Linda Pentz Gunter, with contributions from Kurumi Sugita and Akiko Morimatsu

When Kazumi Kusano stood in the CRIIRAD radiological laboratory in Valence, France listening to lab director, Bruno Chareyron, describe just how radioactive the soil sample taken from a school playground back home in Japan really was, she could not fight back the tears.

“This qualifies as radioactive waste,” Chareyron told them. “The children are playing in a school playground that is very contaminated. The lowest reading is 300,000 bequerels per square meter. That is an extremely high level.” (*CRIIRAD is the Commission for Independent Research and Information about Radiation, an independent research laboratory and NGO*).

Kazumi, a Japanese mother and Fukushima evacuee who prefers not to use her real name, was in France with two other mothers, Mami Kurumada and Akiko Morimatsu — all of whom also brought their children — as part of an educational speaking tour. Morimatsu was also invited to testify before the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, to launch an appeal for the rights of nuclear refugees.

In Japan, seven years since the March 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster began to unfold, the government is requiring some refugees to return to the region. Says Chareyron, whose lab has worked extensively in the Fukushima zone, “the Japanese government is doing everything to force citizens to return to lands where the radiation doses that citizens and children should be subjected to are largely over the typically acceptable norms.”

“People in Japan still don’t believe that the effects they are feeling are due to radiation,” said Kusano during one of the tour stops in France. Indeed, when they took samples in their neighborhoods to be

analyzed for radioactive contamination, they were mocked not only by their neighbors but by government officials.

“We don’t take this seriously in Japan,” said Kurumada, who expressed relief to be among those who understand the true dangers, like Chareyron and the French anti-nuclear activists with whom they met. “In our country, it’s taboo to talk about radiation and contamination.”

Both Kusano and Kurumada are among those who have brought lawsuits against Tepco and the Japanese government, seeking compensation for Fukushima evacuees. Several of these have already ruled in favor of the evacuees and have assigned responsibility for the accident to Tepco and the government while providing financial awards to the plaintiffs. (Kusano’s son’s testimony helped win one of those cases — see our earlier coverage.)

The Japanese government pressured evacuees to return to areas contaminated by the Fukushima disaster by withdrawing their government financial assistance. However, many in areas that were not obligatory evacuation zones also left the region, given the high levels of radioactive contamination.

In addition to the visit to CRIIRAD, the mothers also spoke at public meetings in Lyon, Grenoble and Valence where CRIIRAD is located. The short news video below, in French, captures their visit to the lab.

<https://youtu.be/HzfY0xIy0I8>

At the UN in Geneva, Morimatsu’s testimony was postponed several days by a workforce strike. But eventually, Morimatsu (pictured with her son above the headline) was able to deliver her speech. She said: “My name is Akiko Morimatsu. I am here with other evacuees and mothers, together with Greenpeace. I evacuated from the Fukushima disaster with my two children in May 2011. Shortly after the nuclear accident, radiation contamination spread. We were repeatedly and unnecessarily exposed to unannounced radiation.

“The air, water and soil became severely contaminated. I had no choice but to drink the contaminated water, to breast-feed my baby. To enjoy health, free from radiation exposure, is a fundamental principle. The Japanese Constitution states, ‘We recognize that all peoples of the world have the right to live in peace, free from fear and want.’

“However, the Japanese government has implemented almost no policies to protect its citizens.

Furthermore, the government is focusing on a policy to force people to return to highly contaminated areas.

“I call on the Japanese government to immediately, fully adopt and implement the recommendations of the UN Human Rights Council. I thank UN member states for defending the rights of residents in Japan. Please help us protect people in Fukushima, and in East Japan, especially vulnerable children, from further radiation exposure.”

Earlier that month, the Japanese government had responded to its Universal Periodic Review, by stating that it “supports” 145 recommendations and “notes” 72. One of those recommendations from the UN Human Rights Council, and which Japan “accepted”, was the paragraph that states: “Respect the rights of persons living in the area of Fukushima, in particular of pregnant women and children, to the highest level of physical and mental health, notably by restoring the allowable dose of radiation to the 1 mSv/year limit, and by a continuing support to the evacuees and residents (Germany);”

According to Hajime Matsukubo of Citizens Nuclear Information Center in Tokyo, while the Upper House of the Japanese Diet has indicated its willingness to decrease annual radiation exposures from 20 mSv, the Japanese government has only said it would “follow up” on the specific UN recommendation and report back later. There is no timeframe for such a change, hardly surprising since it would presumably mean once more evacuating people the government has already pressured to return to contaminated areas. The practical implications of this happening leave it very much in doubt.

However, Matsukubo believes that even the commitment to follow up “is a strong tool for us to push the government forward.” Aileen Mioko Smith of Kyoto-based Green Action agrees. “Now we have terrific leverage,” she said. Her group, along with Greenpeace Japan will be looking to “keep the Japanese government’s feet to the fire on this.”

Potters in Iwaki

May 28, 2018

Potter fires up kilns again after evacuating from nuke disaster

By HIROYUKI YAGINUMA/ Staff Writer

Manabu Kondo, left, and his son Takashi hold their wares freshly out of the climbing kiln at the Tokichirogama pottery in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture. The building in the back is a gallery. (Hiroyuki Yaginuma)

IWAKI, Fukushima Prefecture--Manabu Kondo is determined not to let a centuries-old pottery die with him, even after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster forced him to evacuate from Namie in the prefecture. Kondo, 64, the ninth-generation proprietor of the Tokichirogama pottery, opened a full-scale studio here in the spring this year.

“What matters is the spirit handed down to you,” the potter said. “No matter where I do pottery, I have no intention of throwing away the heart and soul of Obori Soma Ware.”

Determined to devote himself to pottery making in his new base with his eldest son Takashi, 37, Kondo installed four kilns, including climbing and gas kilns, in his new studio.

The two will open a gallery for their works on May 30.

Tokichirogama was originally founded during the Edo Period (1603-1867). The kiln in the Obori district of Namie, which had been handed down from his ancestors, cannot be used following the disaster at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

With much of the town remaining designated as a “difficult-to-return zone” seven years after the nuclear disaster because of high radiation levels, prospects for his return home remain uncertain.

Kondo has mixed feelings about leaving his original production base.

“I want to return but I can’t,” Kondo said. “I have no choice but to work in a place to which we evacuated.”

In April, Kondo and his son fired their first batch of pottery in the climbing kiln at the new studio. The last time they made wood-fired pottery was eight years ago when they used the climbing kiln in Namie before the nuclear disaster.

On April 22, the potters, soaked with sweat, removed the vessels, decorated with unique patterns produced by fire, from the kiln.

“I feel like we have taken a new step,” Kondo said with a smile.

Kondo's works featuring “futae-yaki,” a double-layering method distinctive to Obori Soma Ware, and the “zogan” technique, used to create various motifs such as birds by inlaying colored clay, have been displayed at the prestigious Nitten art exhibition and many other contests. Takashi's porcelain have also been shown at Nitten and other exhibitions.

Although their styles are different, the father and son fired their vessels in the climbing kiln together and removed their first batch of works from the furnace.

“I also had reservations, but we managed to somehow work it out,” Takashi said. “I can’t say I don’t feel attached to Namie, but now that we’re here, we want to do our best in this place.”

The Tokichirogama pottery in Iwaki was remodeled from a vacant house formerly used as a private museum, with a new studio added to the structure. The old museum building will be used as a gallery to showcase works by the Kondos, who also invite fellow craftsmen to bring their wares to display. Pottery classes will also be offered.

Dating back at least 300 years, Obori Soma Ware originated in the Obori district of Namie and became widely available mostly thanks to support from the Soma Domain, or present-day northeastern Fukushima Prefecture. It is known for unique features including a running horse motif and blue cracks covering the entire surface.

More than 20 pottery producers had operated before the nuclear crisis erupted, but they scattered to many other locations after they evacuated the town following the nuclear crisis.

Half the potters who left Namie have resumed operations in the Nakadori region in the prefecture and at other locations.

30-km emergency planning zones: What status?

June 2, 2018

EDITORIAL: Giving new status to 30-km zones within nuclear plants

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201806020020.html>

The 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster provided graphic evidence of the lasting and far-reaching damage that can result when this technology goes askew.

Electric utilities that operate nuclear power plants have a duty to respond with utmost sincerity to safety concerns among local governments and communities, especially cities and towns within 30-kilometer emergency planning zones. Utilities should treat local governments within the zones, which are required to develop emergency evacuation plans under stringent new regulations introduced after the March 2011 emergency, equally as the governments in nuclear host communities.

Chugoku Electric Power Co. recently took the first step toward the start of operations of the Shimane nuclear power plant’s new reactor, whose construction was halted following the Fukushima catastrophe. The utility, based in Hiroshima, asked the Shimane prefectural government and the Matsue city government to approve its application to the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) for safety screening of the No. 3 reactor under the new regulatory standards.

The No. 3 reactor was close to completion when the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant went in a triple meltdown. Work to install the necessary safety measures is expected to finish in the first half of 2019.

This facility could become the first new nuclear reactor in Japan to start operation after the Fukushima disaster, an event that triggered tighter safety standards for nuclear plants.

The new reactor, if cleared for operation, will be in service until around 2060 under the principle that imposes a 40-year limit on the operational life of a reactor.

The reactor is part of a complex that has the distinction of being the only nuclear power plant located in the capital of a prefecture.

Within 30 km of the plant lie three other cities in Shimane as well as the cities of Sakaiminato and Yonago in neighboring Tottori Prefecture. **Some 470,000 people live in the 30-km zone.**

In 2011, authorities in Tottori Prefecture and the two cities signed an agreement with Chugoku Electric Power that commits the utility to put top priority on the safety of local residents in operating the plant. These local governments have been demanding that the utility apply the procedures for obtaining consent for reactor operations from the Shimane and Matsue governments also to the local governments in Tottori Prefecture.

In April this year, the prefectural and municipal governments in Tottori formed a joint task force to assess the safety of the new reactor with the help of the utility.

Chugoku Electric Power's move to seek the consent of only the Shimane prefectural government and the Matsue city government to start the process of bringing the reactor online has caused "considerable confusion" among the local communities in Tottori Prefecture, according to Tottori Governor Shinji Hirai. "I feel bewildered" at the way the utility is going ahead with the plan, Hirai said with obvious and justifiable discontent.

Safety agreements between nuclear plant operators and local governments generally require utilities to secure the advance consent of the local governments when new reactors are built or important changes are made to existing facilities. In most cases, however, the scope of the local governments covered is limited to the prefectures and municipalities where the plants are located.

But an agreement was reached this spring between Japan Atomic Power Co. (JAPC), the operator of the Tokai No. 2 nuclear power plant in Ibaraki Prefecture, and five surrounding municipalities that commits JAPC to seek approval from these municipalities within the 30-km zone before bringing its idled reactor back on stream. They include the city of Mito, as well as Tokai village, which hosts the nuclear plant, and the prefecture.

Some local governments around the Shimane nuclear plant are calling on Chugoku Electric Power to hold advance talks over the operation of the new reactor with all the six cities within the 30-km zone. **The utility should treat all the local governments within the emergency planning zone like host communities.**

When Kyushu Electric Power Co. moved to restart the No. 3 reactor at its Genkai nuclear power plant in Saga Prefecture, four of the eight municipalities in three prefectures located within the 30-km zone were up in arms over the plan. But the procedures for the restart went ahead after the town of Genkai, which hosts the plant, and Saga Prefecture gave their consent.

Shimane Governor Zenbe Mizoguchi has indicated his intention to listen to the opinions of all the surrounding local governments, including those in Tottori Prefecture. The Shimane and Matsue governments plan to propose this approach to their respective local assemblies. **The case of the Genkai plant should serve as a cautionary tale for these local governments.**

--The Asahi Shimbun, June 2

What's to be done about tritium?



Storage tanks of contaminated water stand at Tepco's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. Tepco estimates that at the current rate it will run out of tank space in 2020, and a decision must be made on what to do with the water well before then. | BLOOMBERG

June 5, 2018

About that tritiated water: Who will decide and when?

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2018/06/05/commentary/japan-commentary/tritiated-water-will-decide/#.WxehPIouCos>

by Azby Brown

Virtually every news story about the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant acknowledges the tremendous ongoing problem of contaminated water that is accumulating in approximately 850 large tanks on-site. There are about 850,000 tons of water in the tanks at present, from which all radionuclides of concern except tritium — radioactive hydrogen — have been effectively removed. More water accumulates each day, in quantities roughly equal to the amount of groundwater that seeps into the damaged reactor buildings. Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings estimates that at the current rate it will run out of tank space in 2020. Something needs to be done well before then, and the decision should address the concerns of all stakeholders, public and private.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry recently announced that meetings will be held where the public can hear explanations of proposed solutions and comment on them. Unless they think seriously about how to prevent this from becoming yet another clumsy exercise in DAD — “decide, announce, defend” — these meetings will be a mere fig leaf that will allow the government to claim it has adequately consulted the public.

As it is, the government’s decision-making process itself appears to be dysfunctional, and we have reason to be skeptical that it will be possible to avert very bad domestic and international public reactions if and when this water is disposed of.

The Subcommittee on Handling Water Treated by the Polynuclide Removal Facility is one of several Japanese government committees organized by METI tasked with formulating a response to the problem of the radioactive water. The planned public sessions were announced at its eighth meeting, on May 18. This is a step in the right direction, and is long overdue. Nevertheless it may well be a case of “too little, too late.” The decision, delayed for years, will almost certainly be to dilute the water and release it to the ocean, and meanwhile, public opposition to this idea has hardened. The issue hinges on both scientific understanding and public perception.

What is tritium?

Tritium, scientifically indicated as “H3,” occurs both naturally and through man-made processes. Tritiated water (HTO), like that accumulating at the No. 1 nuclear power plant, behaves almost identically to normal water, and can be taken up easily by living organisms.

The scientific consensus is that the health risks from exposure to tritium are several orders of magnitude lower than those from radionuclides like cesium, radioactive iodine or strontium. This is reflected in allowable limits in drinking water, which are generally tens or hundreds of times higher for tritium than for these others, ranging from 100 Bq/L in the European Union to 76,103 Bq/L in Australia. Nevertheless, the scientific community acknowledges some uncertainty about these risks.

Leaving the tritiated water in the tanks at No. 1 is the riskiest thing to do, due to the possibility of ruptures or uncontrolled leaks. As far back as 2014, the International Atomic Energy Agency recommended a controlled release to the ocean as the safest course of action, and Japan’s Nuclear Regulation Agency concurred.

A Tritiated Water Task Force convened by METI in 2013 examined five options in detail, and in 2016 concluded that for reasons of cost, available technology, time required, and safety, diluting and discharging it to the ocean was the least objectionable approach. The task force presented relevant monitoring data from decades of similar releases of tritium to the ocean from nuclear facilities in Japan and abroad, noting that the quantities from the No. 1 plant would be many times smaller and the tritium levels in ocean life too low to be of real concern.

Tepco has made it clear that ocean release is its preference as well. The company says that it strives to meet government recommendations, and does not intend to act without government support, but is ultimately responsible for any actual decision.

In July 2017 Takashi Kawamura, chairman of Tepco, said publicly that the decision to release the tritiated water had already been made, and the public outcry was immediate, particularly from Fukushima fishermen who expected to be consulted. The company quickly backpedaled.

Constructing the dilution facilities and pipelines that an ocean release would require is expected to require almost a year after any decision is made. At the current rate, that means the “go” signal must be given by early 2019 at the latest. That no decision has been officially announced to date can be ascribed to the very reasonable expectation of a strong public backlash, and, I believe, the reluctance of any responsible government officials to be associated with such an unpopular decision.

Fishermen’s opposition

The strongest and most meaningful opposition comes from Fukushima’s fisheries cooperatives, which have suffered tremendously due to the 2011 disaster. Representatives of Tepco, METI and other government bodies that share the mandate for dealing with the contaminated water invariably stress how important it is to them to reach understanding and agreement with all stakeholders, the fisheries cooperatives in particular.

Takahiro Kimoto, a general manager in Tepco’s nuclear power division, explained, “The policies can’t and shouldn’t be determined by Tepco alone, but we continue discussing the available options with

government and other stakeholders. These discussions are taking a long time, but we consider them essential." Put bluntly, Tepco knows they will be pilloried no matter what, and seeks broad support. Shuji Okuda, METI's director for decommissioning and contaminated water management, stressed that no decision has yet been made regarding which of the five options for dealing with the tritiated water will be chosen. "It will be a decision of the Japanese government as a whole," Okuda explains, "not one made by any single agency. And it will be based on ample discussions with all stakeholders."

Although Tepco and METI indicate that they are prepared to accommodate the fishermen's conditions regarding the release, the cooperatives are adamant. "We are totally opposed to the planned release," explained Takaaki Sawada of the Iwaki Office of the Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations, known as FS Gyoren. "It's not a question of money or compensation," he continued, "nor of any level of concentration we might accept as safe. We do not think it should be our responsibility to decide whether or not to release it. We think it will be impossible for the public in general to understand why tritium is considered low risk," he continued, "and expect there will be a large new backlash against Fukushima marine products no matter how scientifically it is explained."

Much hinges on public understanding of the risks, and therefore on transparency. Robust and effective two-way communication is essential, not to persuade the public that official plans are acceptable, but to better equip them to participate in the debate in an informed way, and to push back where they feel it is necessary. It is the public's right to demand this kind of inclusion.

Communication should be aimed not only at fishermen and Japanese consumers, but internationally to all who are concerned about what the effect on the Pacific will be. The government has been sitting on the Task Force recommendations for almost two years without taking action. That it has taken this long to even begin planning to engage the public on this issue is, again, because no one in a governmental decision-making position wants to be politically associated with the consequences of a tritium release. According to METI, the content, location and timing of the public sessions will be discussed at the next subcommittee meeting in July. People unable to attend in person will be able to submit comments and questions via email. Though hastily planned events could possibly be held before the end of this year, it seems likely they will need to happen in 2019, bumping up against the decision deadline.

While some fishermen are likely to attend, the cooperatives themselves will likely refuse. This situation requires the actual involvement of citizens in the decision making process, but it is difficult to find instances of that actually happening in Fukushima since the accident in 2011. At the central government level in particular, it has almost always been DAD.

Regardless of whether one trusts scientific opinion or Tepco, the tritiated water cannot be left in the tanks at No. 1 indefinitely, and releasing it to the ocean, though not without risk, is the least objectionable of the available options. As it stands now, given the depth of public mistrust and the nature of misinformation in our current era, the situation is ripe for the maximum misunderstanding and negative social impact to occur if and when this tritiated water is finally released.

Unfortunately, I think we should be prepared for things to be done the "Kasumigaseki way": for the decision to be avoided until the last possible moment, and for government officials to claim then that an unavoidable emergency had arisen and it couldn't be helped.

There will be negative social impact no matter what, but unless responsible government officials step up soon, own the decision and ensure that public engagement is genuine, broad, and effective, these negative impacts will be unnecessarily magnified.

Azby Brown is the lead researcher for Safecast, a volunteer-based NPO that conducts open, independent, citizen-run monitoring of radiation and other environmental hazards worldwide. www.safecast.org

Imperial couple visits Fukushima



A car carrying Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko runs on National Road No. 6 in Minami-Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, on June 10. Bags containing radioactive soil are piled up along the road. (Hiroyuki Yamamoto)

June 10, 2018

Imperial couple pass evacuation zone 5.8 km from Fukushima plant

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201806100032.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

FUKUSHIMA--Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko passed through a “difficult-to-return zone” near the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant on June 10 on their last visit to the disaster area before abdication. The car carrying the imperial couple was running on an expressway from Iwaki to Minami-Soma in Fukushima Prefecture when it slowed down at a point 5.8 kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, according to the chamberlain of the Imperial Household Agency.

An Imperial Guard official accompanying the couple explained the location of the plant, operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co.

Although the nuclear plant could not be seen through the rainy weather, Akihito and Michiko looked toward its direction without saying a word.

After leaving the expressway, the car ran on National Road No. 6, which is lined on both sides with bags filled with radioactive soil and debris. The couple apparently saw them from inside the vehicle.

The emperor and empress attended a national tree-planting festival held in the prefecture on that day.

On the night of June 9, the couple watched hula girls’ dances at the Spa Resort Hawaiians in Iwaki where they stayed.

The resort was shut down because of damage from the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami that struck on March 11, 2011.

The hula girls lost their place to dance, but they toured Japan and became a symbol of reconstruction from the disaster.

Rie Igari, who had led the dancing team for four years, served as a guide for the imperial couple. With Akihito and Michiko frequently clapping, the hula girls performed dances to three songs, including "Hana wa Saku" (Flowers bloom), a song designed to support rebuilding efforts.

"The emperor and the empress repeatedly visited Fukushima (Prefecture) after the disaster, and their visits promoted reconstruction," said Haruna Suzuki, captain of the dance team.

"Without ever forgetting our feelings of gratitude, we will continue to work to help reconstruction."

June 9, 2018

Imperial couple speak with Fukushima evacuees

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20180609_21/

The Imperial couple began a 3-day visit to Fukushima Prefecture on Saturday and met evacuees from towns near the damaged nuclear plant.

Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko arrived at the Kitayoshima public housing complex in Iwaki City at around 3pm. The complex is one of the largest in the prefecture to house evacuees.

This is the couple's 6th visit to Fukushima since the 2011 disaster, and the first since March 2016.

About 440 evacuees from the towns of Tomioka, Okuma, Futaba and Namie are living in the complex. The couple waved to the many people who came to greet them.

The couple then spoke with representatives of the evacuees in a meeting room.

68-year-old Shigeko Sasaki said she wants to work to preserve the traditional dance of her home town.

The tsunami washed away dance costumes that were kept at a local shrine.

The Emperor said that an activity like that can help strengthen bonds between people.

The couple listened for more than 20 minutes to stories about the challenges the evacuees faced, and details of how they are living now.

The Emperor said he hopes they will overcome their difficulties and build good lives in good health.

The couple will be in Fukushima for 3 days. They are scheduled to attend a tree-planting ceremony in Minamisoma City on Sunday.

This is expected to be the last time the couple visits the disaster-hit Tohoku region before Emperor Akihito abdicates next April.

See also :

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/06/10/national/emperor-empress-visit-tohoku-region-attend-last-national-tree-planting-event/>

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/06/09/national/emperor-empress-meet-nuclear-evacuees-fukushima/>

Planting rice in Fukushima



University students covered in mud plant rice saplings in a drained paddy in the town of Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, on May 19, 2018. (Mainichi)

June 10, 2018

Returnee Fukushima farmers offer taste of rice cultivation in hopes of revitalization

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180610/p2a/00m/0na/005000c>

FUKUSHIMA -- University students and others from around Japan are coming to the farming villages of Fukushima Prefecture where evacuation orders from the 2011 nuclear disaster have been lifted, experiencing rice planting and interacting with local residents who are facing a difficult recovery and population decline.

- **【Related】** Amount of food with radioactive cesium exceeding gov't standards dropping: study
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Organized by local municipal governments and residents, the visits by people from outside the region affected by the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster are providing inspiration to farmers, who have seen less than 20 percent of the pre-disaster farmland planted, and few inheritors to carry on the region's farming industry.

The laughter echoed over the idle farmland of the Sakata district in the town of Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, as university students and other participants planted rice by hand in a drained paddy on May 19.

"Everyone looks like they're having fun," said Namie resident and farmer Kiyoto Matsumoto, 79, with a smile. "Watching them is pretty enjoyable."

Students started coming to Namie to experience rice planting two years ago. The idea of the event was to have them learn about the current conditions in areas affected by the March 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disasters, and to link the awareness with the revitalization of the region. On that day, roughly 60 students worked up a sweat in the mud of the rice paddies. The students can also take part in the harvest of the crops and sell the rice at a local festival held in the town in November.

"I really got a feel for how hard farmers work, and I also learned about the lack of successors to take over the farms and other issues," said an 18-year-old first-timer, a student at Waseda University in Tokyo. Matsumoto hopes that "the young people (who participate) will be able to feel something through experiencing agricultural work."

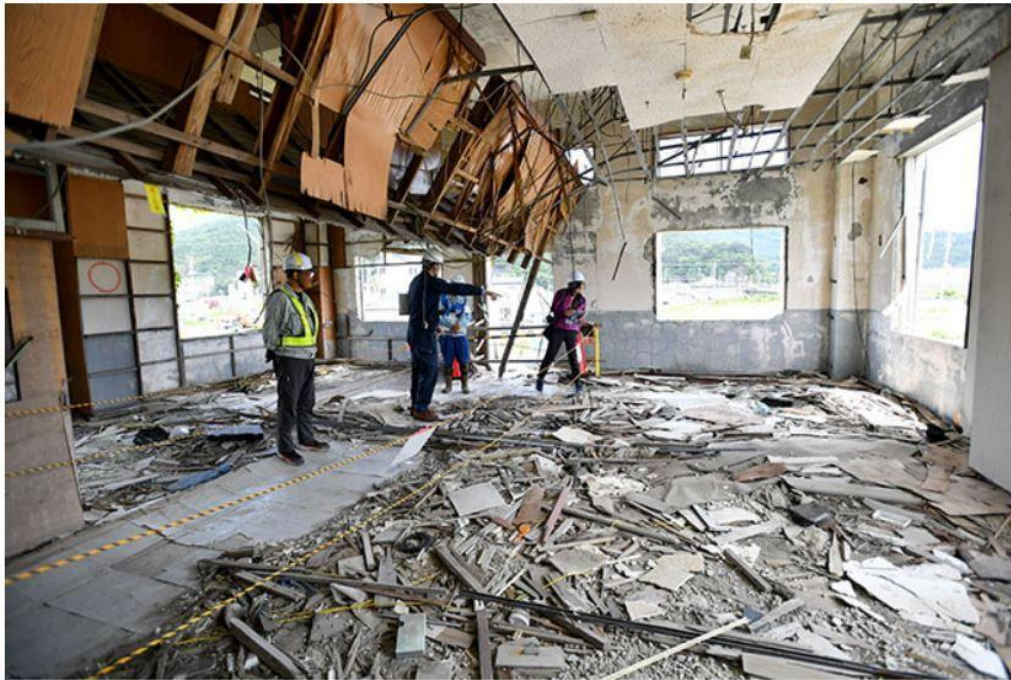
In areas where the 2011 evacuation order has been lifted, rice production has once again become possible. The Fukushima Prefectural Government has been testing all rice produced within the prefecture, and there have been no cases where the rice exceeded the standard limit of the radioactive material cesium from 2015-2017. Still, even after the evacuation order was lifted, residents have not been returning to their pre-disaster homes, and with the added influence of an aging population and a lack of successors, there are few farmers who have taken up rice cultivation again. **Of the farmland across the five villages and towns of Tomioka, Namie, Iitate, Katsurao and Naraha, the Odaka Ward of the city of Minamisoma and the Yamakiya district of the town of Kawamata, for which evacuation orders were lifted between 2015 and 2017, only between less than 1 percent to 14 percent of the pre-disaster farmland was in use this spring.**

In the village of Iitate, 73-year-old farmer Masao Aita also held a rice-planting event on May 19 for adults and students alike that attracted 32 participants. Aita and his wife just returned to the village the month before. The couple had given up on cultivating rice out of concern that they would not be able to sell what they had produced, and planned to plant the fields with tulips and other flowers. However, they were approached by a volunteer group. The group recommended the rice cultivation event.

Aita plans to send the harvested rice to each of the participants and have them give it a taste. "If people from the outside come visit the village, then it is bound to spark something eventually," he said.

(Japanese original by Shuji Ozaki, Fukushima Bureau)

Time stands still at Otsuchi



The wrecked interior of the former town hall in Otsuchi, Iwate Prefecture, on June 13. Damage to the second floor ceiling shows the destructive power of the tsunami. (Yosuke Fukudome)

June 14, 2018

Where time stands still in disaster-stricken Iwate town

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201806140042.html>

OTSUCHI, Iwate Prefecture--Time stands still at the building here that served as Otsuchi's town hall when the earthquake and tsunami disaster struck in 2011.

Reporters were given a tour of the wrecked structure June 13 ahead of moves to demolish it next week. Twenty staff members working on disaster countermeasures in front of the building were swept away, as were eight who were trapped inside.

A bereaved family of one of the victims filed a temporary injunction June 11 to stop the demolition work on grounds further investigation was needed to ascertain whether the local authorities could have done more to save lives.

The interior of the building is just a shell. The tsunami spawned by the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake reached the second floor of the building.

Much of the city was obliterated, and a high number of senior officials perished, which has hindered reconstruction work.

The floors of the building are littered with debris, not a single glass windowpane remains, the walls are crumbling and a clock is frozen at the time the disaster struck.

Twenty-three others managed to reach the roof via a metal ladder fixed to the wall.

Exploiting disaster for tourism

June 25, 2018

As Fukushima residents return, some see hope in nuclear tourism

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/06/25/national/fukushima-residents-return-see-hope-nuclear-tourism/#.WzDLzYoyWos>

by Tim Kelly

Reuters

FUKUSHIMA – On a cold day in February, Takuto Okamoto guided his first tour group to a panorama few outsiders have witnessed in person: construction cranes looming over Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Seven years after deadly tsunami ripped through the plant in Fukushima Prefecture, and as residents who fled the nuclear catastrophe trickle back, Okamoto and other tour organizers are bringing curious sightseers to the region.

Many returnees hope tourism will help resuscitate their towns and ease radiation fears. But some worry about drawing a line under a disaster whose impact will be felt far into the future. The cleanup, including the removal of melted uranium fuel, may take four decades and cost several billion dollars each year. "The disaster happened and the issue now is how people rebuild their lives," Okamoto said after his group stopped in Tomioka, 10 kilometers (6.21 miles) south of the nuclear plant. He currently runs tours just twice a month, but he wants to bring groups twice a week.

As Okamoto's passengers peered out tour bus windows at the cranes poking above the nuclear plant, electronic signs on the highway to Tomioka showed radiation at around 100 times normal background levels.

"For me it's more for bragging rights, to be perfectly honest," said Louie Ching, 33, a Filipino programmer. Ching, two other Filipinos and a Japanese man who visited Chernobyl last year each paid ¥23,000 (\$208.75) for a day trip from Tokyo.

The group had earlier wandered around Namie, a town 4 kilometers north of the plant to which residents began returning last year after authorities lifted restrictions. So far, only about 700 of 21,000 people have returned — a ratio similar to that of other ghost towns near the nuclear site.

Former residents Mitsuru Watanabe, 80, and his wife Rumeko, 79, have no plans to come home. They were only in town to clear out their shuttered restaurant before it is demolished, but they chatted with tourists while they worked.

"We used to pull in around ¥100 million a year," Mitsuru said as he invited the tourists inside. A 2011 calendar hung on the wall, and unfilled orders from the evacuation day remained on a whiteboard in the kitchen.

"We want people to come. They can go home and tell other people about us," Mitsuru said among the dusty tables.

Okamoto's group later visited the nearby coastline, where the tsunami killed hundreds of people. Abandoned rice paddies, a few derelict houses that withstood the waves and the gutted Ukedo Elementary School are all that remain.

It's here, behind a new sea wall at the edge of the restricted radiation zone, that Fukushima Prefecture plans to build a memorial park and 5,200-square-meter (56,000-square-foot) archive center, complete with video displays and exhibits about the quake, tsunami and nuclear calamity.

“It will be a starting point for visitors,” Kazuhiro Ono, the prefecture’s deputy director for tourism, said of the center.

The Japan Tourism Agency will fund the project, Ono added. Ono wants tourists to come to Fukushima — particularly foreigners, who have so far steered clear. Overseas visitors spent more than 70 million days in Japan last year, triple the number in 2011. About 94,000 of those were in Fukushima.

Tepco will provide material for the archive, although the final budget for the project has yet to be finalized, he said.

“Some people have suggested a barbecue area or a promenade,” said Hidezo Sato, a former seed merchant in Namie who leads a residents’ group. A “1” sticker on the radiation meter around his neck identified him as being the first to return to the town.

“If people come to brag about getting close to the plant, that can’t be helped, but at least they’ll come,” Sato said. The archive will help ease radiation fears, he added.

Standing outside a farmhouse as workmen continued its refurbishment, so her family could return, Mayumi Matsumoto, 54, said she was uneasy about the park and archive.

“We haven’t gotten to the bottom of what happened at the plant, and now is not the time,” she said.

Matsumoto had come back for a day to host a rice-planting event for about 40 university students. Later they toured Namie on two buses, including a stop at scaffolding near the planned memorial park site to view the cranes at the nuclear plant.

Matsumoto described her feelings toward Tepco as “complicated,” because it is responsible for the disaster but also helped her family cope its aftermath. One of her sons works for the utility and has faced abuse from angry locals, she added.

“It’s good that people want to come to Namie, but not if they just want to get close to the nuclear plant. I don’t want it to become a spectacle,” Matsumoto said.

Okamoto is not the only guide offering tours in the area, although visits of any kind remain rare. He said he hoped his clients would come away with more than a few photographs.

“If people can see for themselves the damage caused by tsunami and nuclear plant, they will understand that we need to stop it from happening again,” said Okamoto, who attended university in a neighboring prefecture. “So far, we haven’t come across any opposition from the local people.”

See also :

June 21, 2018

As Fukushima residents return, some see hope in nuclear tourism

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201806210027.html>

Is this enough for a return to normal?

June 26, 2018

Fukushima town opens shopping center for returnees

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20180626_22/

The town of Naraha, Fukushima Prefecture, has opened a shopping center for the benefit of residents who have returned following the earthquake and nuclear crisis in 2011, and to encourage others to come home.

The area where the 3,300-square-meter complex is located includes public housing and medical institutions.

Ten businesses including a supermarket, hardware store and restaurants opened their doors on Tuesday.

The evacuation order in Naraha was lifted in September 2015. As of the end of May, nearly half the town's former inhabitants had come back.

The town has begun operating free shuttle bus services between all its districts and the center to make life easier for those who return.

One woman said she's happy that the center is accessible and that it will become a place where the townsfolk can socialize.

Fukushima residents oppose NRA's plan to remove dosimeters

July 10, 2018

Fukushima Residents Oppose Govt. Plan

<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/videos/20180710112706325/>

July 9, 2018

Locals opposed to removal of most dosimeters in Fukushima

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201807090004.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

TADAMI, Fukushima Prefecture--Officials and residents in Fukushima Prefecture are opposing the central government plan to remove 80 percent of the radiation dosimeters set up in the wake of the 2011 accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) in March announced plans to remove 2,400 of the 3,000 monitoring posts by fiscal 2020 in areas where dose rates have fallen and keep the remaining 600 in 12 municipalities around the plant.

About 20 residents on June 25 attended a meeting here during which the NRA secretariat explained a plan to remove seven of nine monitoring posts in the town, including those installed at three elementary and junior high schools.

Shoji Takeyama, head of the secretariat's monitoring information section, asked the residents to understand the objectives of the move.

"We believe that continuous measuring is unnecessary in areas where dose rates are low and stable," Takeyama said. "The equipment requires huge maintenance costs. We have to effectively use the limited amount of funds."

Residents expressed opposition.

One described the plan as being "out of the question," saying that the shipment of edible wild plants and mushrooms in Tadami was prohibited although the town is far from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The secretariat emphasized that two portable monitoring posts will remain in the town.

NRA officials have said dose rates have significantly dropped in areas other than those near the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, annual maintenance costs for monitoring posts total 400 million yen (\$3.64 million) and that the dosimeters will soon reach the end of their 10-year operating lives.

In late June, the NRA was forced to suspend the plan to remove 27 monitoring posts in Nishigo after the village assembly adopted a statement opposing the plan, saying that sufficient explanations have not been provided to residents.

The Aizu-Wakamatsu city government in May submitted a request to continue operating monitoring posts to the NRA.

The city argues "there are citizens who are concerned about the radiation's potential impact on their health and possible accidents that could happen during decommissioning work, and such people can feel relieved by visually checking dose rates constantly with monitoring systems."

The prefectural government says it is "calling on the central government to proceed with the plan while winning consent from residents at the same time."

A citizens group has sent a statement to the prefectural government and seven cities and towns, calling for maintaining monitoring posts. It has also collected more than 2,000 signatures on a petition to be submitted to the NRA.

Yumi Chiba, 48, a co-leader of the group, said authorities should take into account the reality surrounding those residing in Fukushima Prefecture.

"What is important is not knowing the average but identifying where dose rates are higher," said Chiba, who lives in Iwaki in the prefecture. "I would like authorities to consider the circumstances facing residents."

The NRA plans to offer explanations to residents according to requests. The gathering in Tadami was the first of its kind, and similar meetings are planned in Kitakata, Aizu-Wakamatsu and Koriyama on July 16, July 28 and Aug. 5, respectively.

The NRA is also making arrangements to hold meetings in 15 other municipalities.

(This article was written by Hiroshi Ishizuka and Yasuo Tomatsu.)

Torch relay in Fukushima to lift spirits?

July 13, 2018

1964 Olympic torch bearer hopes 2020 runners will spur hope in Fukushima

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180713/p2a/00m/0na/018000c>

YABUKI, Fukushima -- A 71-year-old man here who served as a torch bearer in the 1964 Tokyo Olympics looks to see young people from this prefecture encourage residents affected by the nuclear disaster through their torch relay ahead of the 2020 Tokyo Games.

- **【Related】** Tokyo 2020 torch relay plan draws attention to areas hit by March 2011 disasters
- **【Related】** 2020 Olympic torch relay to start in Fukushima on March 26
- **【Related】** Tokyo Olympics

Fukushima Prefecture was on July 12 named the starting point for the 2020 Olympic torch relay in Japan. 1964 runner Masao Yabuki, a resident of the prefectural town of Yabuki, hopes that the relay will play a part in boosting disaster recovery, as touted by the Tokyo 2020 organizing committee.

"I hope the torch relay will uplift the spirits of those affected by the disaster, if only a little," said Yabuki, a former Japan Agricultural Cooperatives employee.

Yabuki was a third-year student and a member of a track team at what is now Shirakawa Jitsugyo High School in Shirakawa in southern Fukushima Prefecture, when he was chosen to run in the city, alongside two teammates. "I was probably picked as I was a third-year student back then. I was just lucky," he recalled.

He was assigned to run through an approximately 2-kilometer zigzag course from the entrance to the castle town's downtown area to the city hall. He practiced by holding a metal bat high up in the air with his right hand while running.

On Sept. 30, 1964, he covered the designated stretch with the real Olympic torch in his hand as some 100,000 spectators filled the streets.

"My mind was completely blank. I couldn't even hear cheers from spectators as I was so absorbed," he said.

Nearly half a century later, Yabuki's house was partially damaged due to a massive earthquake registering a lower 6 on the Japanese seismic intensity scale of 7 in his area on March 11, 2011.

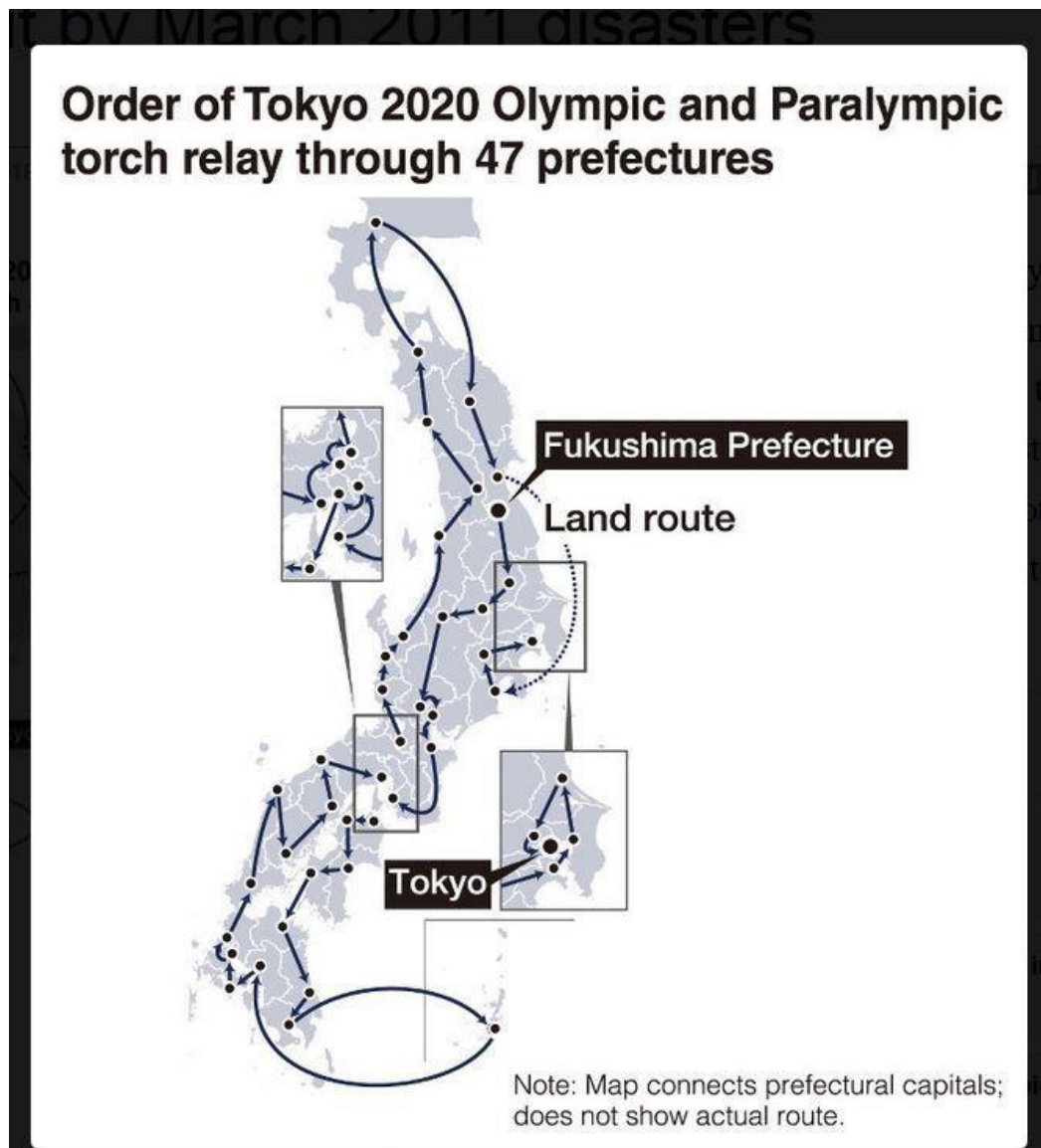
In the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster triggered by the quake and ensuing tsunami, temporary housing units for evacuees from the nuclear disaster were built in the town of Yabuki. Seven years on, people who are still unable to return to their hometowns are living in those housing units.

Last year, Yabuki drove through areas along the Pacific Coast stricken by the tsunami and nuclear disasters. What he saw were rice paddies and fields long left unattended and almost empty streets, even in areas where nuclear evacuation orders had already been lifted. In other areas where such orders remained in place, towns were overgrown with wild grass and trees. Such landscapes saddened Yabuki. The Fukushima Prefectural Government will establish an organizing committee for the 2020 Games to select the specific torch relay path. The governments of 15 cities, towns and villages in the prefecture -- which were damaged by the 2011 tsunami and ordered to evacuate residents due to the nuclear crisis -- are calling for their streets to be included in the relay route.

While Yabuki wishes to once again become a torch bearer himself, even if to cover just 100 meters, he believes that the upcoming torch relay should be one that can uplift local residents by covering the coastal "Hamadori" region of Fukushima, not the mid-inland "Nakadori" region including the town of Yabuki, to embody the spirit of the "disaster recovery Olympics" by conveying the current situation to the rest of the country.

(Japanese original by Shuji Ozaki, Fukushima Bureau)

Torch relay in Fukushima



July 13, 2018

Tokyo 2020 torch relay plan draws attention to areas hit by March 2011 disasters

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180713/p2a/00m/0na/007000c>

With the starting point for the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games torch relay set to begin in Fukushima Prefecture, which was hit hard by the March 2011 quake, tsunami and nuclear disaster, anticipation is growing in the prefecture and other areas ahead of the two-year countdown mark to the games on July 24.

- **【Related】** 1964 Olympic torch bearer hopes 2020 runners will spur hope in Fukushima
- **【Related】** 2020 Olympic torch relay to start in Fukushima on March 26
- **【Related】** Swimmers put on traditional-style show in bid to join Tokyo 2020 torch relay
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- **【Related】** Mori requests longer Olympic torch relay for flame to travel through disaster-hit areas

The torch relay for the 1964 games wrapped the entire country up in passion for the event, but the 2020 relay looks to become an even bigger phenomenon, making its way through all 47 of Japan's prefectures. The Tokyo Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games established a committee and began selecting the route and the starting point in February 2017. From the outset, the committee had planned to pay special attention to disaster-hit areas, but the relay was to begin in late March, and in the northern Japanese regions of Hokkaido and Tohoku, the temperature would still be low.

Moving from the southernmost prefecture of Okinawa northward with the blooming spring cherry blossoms was the most logical choice, and there were southwestern areas of the country such as Kumamoto Prefecture, which was hit by a double earthquake disaster in April 2016, and other areas around the country that could represent Japan's resilience. There were arguments as to whether or not the message of recovery should be limited to just the areas hit by the March 2011 triple disaster. Still, the committee decided to begin the route in Fukushima Prefecture to dispel any doubts that the image of "disaster recovery" held up by the organizing committee and the government would be obscured. The idea of holding the games as a sign of recovery had been put forward since the International Olympic Committee general assembly met in September 2013 when the Tokyo games were decided, but the proposal ended up being a double-edged sword -- foreign media were still pointing out the risks of contaminated water leaking from the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, however, who traveled to where the assembly was held in Buenos Aires, explained that the "situation was under control."

Despite the government's commitment to a games in the spirit of recovery, the people of Japan have not been so fast to warm up to the idea, asking what the games will actually do for the reconstruction of the regions hit by disasters. With personnel, financial resources and facilities lacking, there were quite a few disaster-hit municipalities that viewed things like "host town" registration to plan exchanges with participating countries and regions as well as the hosting of pre-game training camps as burdensome. In November 2016, the Tokyo 2020 organizing committee decided that Fukushima Prefecture would be the venue for the baseball and softball events of the games, and in April this year, it was decided that the Olympic flame from Greece would be exhibited in the three prefectures on the northeastern Pacific coast hit hardest by the March 2011 disasters -- Fukushima, Miyagi and Iwate -- as a "flame of recovery."

"We have to create some substance to the image of the games as an event of recovery," said Minister in charge of the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games Shunichi Suzuki, emphasizing the need to connect the activities of the games to the regions they hoped to uplift.

In the relay path announced on July 12, the torch will not travel through the three prefectures of Fukushima, Miyagi and Iwate at once, but rather travel south from Fukushima to do away with worries about the March temperatures in the northern region of Japan. So far, there have not been any complaints. Mayor Hiroshi Kameyama of the heavily hit city of Ishinomaki in Miyagi Prefecture, just north of Fukushima, who fought for his city to be the relay starting point, released a comment stating, "We're all a part of the Tohoku region, and I hope that having Fukushima Prefecture, where there are still quite a number of victims of the disaster, decided as the starting point for the relay will provide strength in moving toward reconstruction."

(Japanese original by Kazuhiro Tahara, Tadashi Murakami and Akira Matsumoto, Sports News Department)

Fukushima beach reopens after 8 years

July 21, 2018

July 21, 2018

Fukushima beach opens for first time in 8 years

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20180721_17/

Several beaches ravaged by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in northeastern Japan have been reopened for bathing for the first time in 8 years.

Haragamaobama beach in Soma City, Fukushima Prefecture, was opened to the public on Saturday.

Seawalls on the beach were badly damaged by the tsunami 8 years ago. But the reconstruction work has been completed.

A ritual was held to pray for safety, and a group of local residents released balloons into the sky before the beach was officially declared open.

Children then jumped into the water all at once.

Local diners have opened beach houses to offer shaved ice with syrup on top, as well as other food and drinks.

A woman in her 30s said she is happy to once again be able to swim in the sea, where she would come every year before the disaster.

A teenage boy said he has been looking forward to the opening of the beach. He said he wants to fully enjoy himself with his friends.

Four beaches in Fukushima Prefecture have reopened since the disaster including in Iwaki and Soma.

But the remaining 14 beaches remain closed in the aftermath of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident. Local officials have decided some of them will remain closed permanently.

July 20, 2018

Only 24 of 70 beaches reopen to public since 2011 tsunami

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201807200033.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

RIKUZENTAKATA, Iwate Prefecture--A public beach officially opened here July 20 for the first time in eight years, underscoring the destruction of sites along the Tohoku coast that bore the initial brunt of the 2011 tsunami.

Hirota beach in Rikuzentakata, a city that was devastated in the disaster, is one of 24 beaches that will be officially open to the public this summer in the prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima.

That figure is **only about a third of the 70 that were available before the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami struck the Tohoku region on March 11, 2011.**

Miho Mitsui, who lives in Rikuzentakata's Hirotacho district, visited Hirota beach with her two young daughters on the morning of July 20.

"Until this year, we were disappointed at being unable to go into the sea, especially with the water so clear," the 28-year-old homemaker said. "I want to come here every day."

Before the 2011 disaster, Hirota and the city's other public beach, Takata Matsubara, were key parts of social life among the locals.

Takata Matsubara beach became known as the site where a pine forest was wiped out by the tsunami, leaving only one "miracle pine tree" standing. The tree has since died, and the city is still trying to restore sand at the beach, which is still not officially open to the public.

For "officially opened" beaches, municipal governments and other operators provide maintenance and other care, **check the water quality to ensure safety**, and operate necessary facilities.

But at some of the sites in the Tohoku region, the beaches have essentially disappeared.

In the village of Tanohata, Iwate Prefecture, more than 100 kilometers north of Rikuzentakata, the two public beaches have been closed to the public over the past eight years for the construction of seawalls. Tanohata Mayor Hiroshi Ishihara decided to use the Tsukuehama beach as a temporary public beach from July 26, saying it is "undesirable to deprive children, who live in the coastal village, of the experience of swimming in the sea."

Haragamaobama beach in Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, about 40 kilometers north of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, is also scheduled to reopen for the first time in eight years on July 21.

But south of the nuclear plant, in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, the city government in May decided that Kattsuo beach could no longer be considered a public beach. Much of the sandy area of the beach disappeared in plate movements caused by the offshore earthquake as well as the construction of seawalls.

Nobiru beach and the surrounding area in Higashi-Matsushima, Miyagi Prefecture, will remain closed for now.

A city government official said the beach area will reopen once "escape routes are set up (for possible future tsunami)."

The Iwate prefectural government has set up a technical review committee to explore the feasibility of restoring sand at Negishi beach in Kamaishi and Namiita beach in Otsuchi that were hit hard by the tsunami.

(This article was written by Yosuke Watanabe and Yasushi Okubo.)

Child statue in Fukushima removed



August 28, 2018

Controversial Fukushima statue of child in radiation suit to be removed

https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180828/p2g/00m/0dm/094000c#cxrecs_s

FUKUSHIMA (Kyodo) -- The city of Fukushima will remove a statue of a child clad in a protective suit due to criticism that it misleads the public into believing that local people, hit by a nuclear crisis in 2011, need to wear such gear, its mayor said Tuesday.

- **【Related】** Taiwan to hold referendum on lifting Fukushima food ban in November
- **【Related】** Free temporary housing for Fukushima evacuees to mostly end in March '20
- **【Related】** Researchers develop technology to remove radioactive tritium from water

"We set up the statue as a symbol of people striving for reconstruction but have come to judge that the statue is not accepted by many citizens," said Mayor Hiroshi Kohata.

The city, which erected the 6.2-meter statue dubbed "Sun Child" near JR Fukushima Station on Aug. 3, will stop displaying it as soon as possible and consider what to do with the work of art, the mayor added.

The statue of a child in a yellow protective suit, looking up with an adhesive bandage on the cheek, was produced by contemporary artist Kenji Yanobe to express his wish for a world free of nuclear disasters. Yanobe said he was hoping to cheer people up following the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami that triggered the Fukushima nuclear crisis as the statue depicts a child braving a difficult situation.

The statue indicates that the surrounding air is "clean" as the child is holding and not wearing a helmet and a radiation counter on the chest reads "000."

"(The removal) is truly regrettable, but I thought we shouldn't provoke a confrontation anymore among people inside and outside the city," said Yanobe on his website on Tuesday.

A questionnaire survey conducted by the city, which had received responses from 110 people as of Monday, showed most were negative about the statue, with 75 respondents demanding either its relocation or removal. Some of them questioned the zero displayed on the radiation counter as even in areas unaffected by nuclear disasters the level is never zero due to background radiation.

Only 22 people were positive, with one person saying, "Something with an impact is needed in Fukushima," according to the city.

In one of the world's worst nuclear crises, three of the six reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in the prefecture suffered meltdowns, spewing radioactive materials into the surrounding environment.

Decontamination and other efforts are under way to enable people who lived near the disaster-stricken plant to return to their hometowns.

End of free temporary housing



This file photo taken in April 2017 shows temporary housing in the city of Nihonmatsu in central Fukushima Prefecture in northeastern Japan for evacuees from the 2011 disaster at the Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. (Mainichi)

August 28, 2018

Free temporary housing for Fukushima evacuees to mostly end in March '20

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180828/p2a/00m/0na/008000c>

FUKUSHIMA -- The government of Fukushima Prefecture in northeastern Japan has announced it will terminate in March 2020 the provision of free temporary housing to most of the evacuees from areas in four towns and villages rendered difficult to live in due to fallout from the 2011 triple core meltdowns at the Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

- **【In Photos】** Fire festival held for 1st time in 8 years after Fukushima disaster
- **【Related】** Environment ministry lost 10 kg of low level contaminated soil
- **【Related】** Gov't decides against increasing compensation fund for nuclear disaster

It was the first time to set a deadline to end housing support for evacuees from those "difficult to return" areas. The new measure, announced on Aug. 27, will stop the provision of all rent-free temporary housing from dwellings in the towns of Okuma and Futaba where the nuclear plant is located.

The termination of the support program will affect a total of 3,298 households who had to move out of difficult to return areas in the villages of Katsurao and Iitate, as well as the towns of Tomioka and Namie.

The measure will cover both temporary prefabricated housing as well as private rental accommodation paid for by the prefecture.

The prefectural government explained that the financial support is being phased out as it is now possible for those residents to find stable homes on their own, among other reasons. Meanwhile, the prefecture will conduct an opinion poll on some 1,661 households from Okuma and Futaba to determine whether to continue to offer free housing for them after March 2020.

The free temporary housing service will end in March next year for evacuees of 2,389 households from five municipalities including the village of Kawauchi and the town of Kawamata, where evacuation orders have been lifted, but the service can be extended for another year for people with special circumstances. Evacuation orders prompted by the 2011 nuclear disaster targeted 11 municipalities although they were eventually lifted for nine cities, towns and villages by April 2017 except Futaba and Okuma as well as difficult to return zones in some of the municipalities.

(Japanese original by Hideyuki Kakinuma, Fukushima Bureau)

Monitoring stations to be installed around nuclear plants

September 4, 2018

Reactor hosts to set up systems to check for plumes of radioactivity

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201809040018.html>

By YUSUKE OGAWA/ Staff Writer

Japan's nuclear watchdog decided Sept. 3 to instruct municipalities that host nuclear power plants to install atmospheric monitoring systems that can detect radioactive plumes in accidents and warn residents of the dangers.

Central government grants can be used to set up the monitoring stations within a 30-kilometer radius of all nuclear power plants, the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) said.

A plume containing radioactive substances emerges after a reactor meltdown and can spread over wide areas via wind. The substances can contaminate the ground in rainfall.

In the event of a serious nuclear accident, the atmospheric monitoring systems will measure radiation concentrations in the air every 10 minutes to determine if a plume has indeed formed.

One system will consist of a maximum 48 measurement devices--three at each of 16 different areas from the plant.

To minimize radiation exposure among residents, the measurement figures will be shared in real time and improve the accuracy of data used to issue evacuation orders or warnings to remain indoors, according to an NRA official.

Monitoring posts have been set up across the nation to measure radiation dosage rates. However, it is difficult to determine if the radiation measured has been deposited on the ground from a plume drifting in the air.

The NRA will also instruct the municipalities to prepare emergency power sources for the monitoring systems in case electricity stops in a nuclear plant emergency.

Sports festival at J-Village

September 10, 2018

Festival held at new soccer training ground at 'J-Village' in Fukushima

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180910/p2a/00m/0na/022000c>

NARAH/A/HIRONO, Fukushima -- A sports festival was held here on Sept. 8 at "J-Village," the practice facility for the national soccer team, to commemorate the opening of a new domed training field.

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Following the Fukushima nuclear disaster in March 2011, J-Village became an accident response center. The facility was reopened in July this year and a new all-weather domed training field with an artificial lawn pitch measuring 115 meters by 73 meters, the largest indoor training field in Japan, was opened at the site.

While it was raining on the day of the festival, local elementary school students and other related individuals took part in a relay race using a giant ball and a competition to see which team could toss the most number of balls in a net in a set time.

More than 40,000 residents in Fukushima Prefecture remain evacuated even though some 7.5 years have passed since the outbreak of the disaster. The reopening of J-Village is aimed at increasing the number of visitors to the prefecture. A facility worker said, "I want to revitalize the prefecture and hand it over to the next generation."

(Japanese original by Toshiki Miyazaki, Fukushima Bureau)

Most Fukushima hospitals in the red

September 11, 2018

70% of hospitals near Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant are losing money

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/09/11/national/70-hospitals-near-fukushima-no-1-nuclear-plant-bleeding-money/#.W5fvtfkyWos>

JJI

FUKUSHIMA – Around 70 percent of medical institutions near the disaster-stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power station are operating in the red after restarting services, due to lower patient numbers and mounting labor costs.

The number of patients per day at Tomioka Chuo Iin, a clinic in the town of Tomioka in Fukushima Prefecture, has declined to about one-tenth the level seen before the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, which triggered a meltdown at the nuclear power plant owned and operated by Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc.

An evacuation order was lifted for many areas in the town in April last year.

"We can't continue without financial assistance," said Akira Isaka, the 78-year-old head of the clinic.

According to the Fukushima Prefectural Government, about 100 medical institutions in 12 municipalities were operating around the nuclear power station before the accident, but the figure had fallen to 31 as of the end of last month.

In areas where the evacuation order was lifted, "we need to look at supply and demand when preparing medical services," Isaka said.

Local residents are hoping for services will improve, according to surveys by the Reconstruction Agency and local governments.

With multiple answers allowed, the share of households that cited better medical services as an important component of daily life stood at 68.5 percent in Tomioka and 78.7 percent in Namie, another Fukushima town close to the nuclear plant.

Many evacuees say they plan to make decisions on whether to return to their hometowns by taking into account, among other things, whether medical and nursing care services have resumed and if satisfactory levels of services are available.

But some 70 percent of medical institutions that have resumed services are accepting financial assistance as they are unable to make ends meet by themselves.

An outflow of medical workers, caused by the evacuation after the nuclear disaster, has made it difficult for hospitals and clinics to secure employees unless they offer good salaries and working conditions. They have also been hit by decreases in patient numbers, resulting in high vacancy rates — which affects their income — even in areas where the evacuation order has been lifted.

Because there are many elderly residents in these areas, the need for home health care and rehabilitation is expected to increase.

“A big challenge is who will take care of elderly people,” Isaka said. Previously, younger generations cooperated to look after elderly people in their communities, but the situation has changed now, he said.

The Fukushima Prefectural Government has set up a 24-hour emergency hospital in Tomioka, while continuing financial and other assistance for existing medical institutions near the nuclear plant.

“We’ve projected that there won’t be many patients, and how to help local medical institutions stabilize their operations is a hurdle we need to clear,” a Fukushima official said. There are also plans to work with a public-private team that is seeking to help businesses affected by the 3/11 disasters get back on their feet, the official said.

Still 60,000 evacuees after more than 7 years



A tsunami triggered by the March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake is seen surging inland in Natori, Miyagi Prefecture, in the country's northeast. (Mainichi)

September 11, 2018

Nearly 60,000 evacuees, 5,623 in temporary housing 7.5 yrs after Tohoku disaster

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180911/p2a/00m/0na/004000c>

Seven and a half years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake hit Japan on March 11, 2011, but nearly 60,000 people still remain in evacuation and more than 5,600 people are living in temporary housing because of the quake, devastating tsunami and the triple core meltdowns at the Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO)'s Fukushima No.1 Nuclear Power Plant.

- **【Related】** Festival held at new soccer training ground at 'J-Village' in Fukushima
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According to the government's Reconstruction Agency, about 58,000 people still remained in evacuation as of August, although their number declined by about 15,000 during the past six months. As many as 5,623 people were living in prefabricated houses in the northeastern Japan prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima, as of the end of August.

The construction of public housing for victims of the disaster is 96.5 percent complete, with 29,124 units built out of a planned 30,178 in those three prefectures as of late July. The achievement rate is 91.1 percent for Iwate and 98.4 percent for Miyagi. In Fukushima, the figure is 96.3 percent for evacuees from the nuclear accident.

Around the TEPCO nuclear power plant that spewed out a large amount of highly radioactive materials from the melted cores, 11 municipalities received evacuation orders from the central government. Although the orders were lifted in 70 percent of those areas by the spring of 2017, a total of seven cities, towns and villages still have so-called "difficult-to-return" zones with high radioactivity. Even in areas where evacuation orders have been lifted, the ratio of actual to registered residents is about 20 percent. The central government intends to phase out temporary housing in Iwate and Miyagi by fiscal 2020 when its designated reconstruction and revitalization period will end, but the timing will be delayed to fiscal 2021 or later in Fukushima. The preparation of land plots where people affected by the disaster can build their own houses is 90.6 percent complete in the three prefectures.

As of Sept. 10, the number of those killed by the 2011 disaster stood at 15,896, and 2,536 people remained missing. The Reconstruction Agency says 3,676 people in 10 prefectures, including Tokyo, had died of causes related to the disaster, as of the end of March this year.

(Japanese original by Nobuyuki Hyakutake, Ishinomaki Local Bureau, and Toshiki Miyazaki, Fukushima Bureau)

Archives project of lessons from 3/11 disaster

September 12, 2018

Fukushima prof., residents seek to establish an archive of nuke disaster lessons

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180912/p2a/00m/0na/028000c>

KATSURAO, Fukushima -- A Fukushima University professor and his team are gathering materials for an archive project to pass on the lessons learned from the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and nuclear disaster in this prefecture in northeastern Japan.

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In a March 2017 plan finalized by the Fukushima Prefectural Government, the archives will be inaugurated in the summer of 2020 at a cost of approximately 5.5 billion yen in the town of Futaba, which has been rendered "difficult to live" due to radioactive fallout from the triple core meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO)'s Fukushima No.1 Nuclear Power Plant in March 2011. The facility will have a total floor space of 5,200 square meters with areas for exhibitions, management and research, storage, training sessions and holding meetings. The design was modeled after a similar center in the western Japan city of Kobe that was built to store records of the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake, but with more focus on the nuclear disaster than the quake itself.

Professor Kenji Yaginuma of Fukushima University's Fukushima Future Center for Regional Revitalization and his team are visiting places affected by the nuclear accident and **collecting testimonies of residents, documents, pictures and images for the project.**

Yaginuma recently interviewed Tetsuyama Matsumoto, 61, who used to be a cattle breeder in the village of Katsurao, to hear his story about how his cows had to be slaughtered after the nuclear accident.

"I can't believe they killed the cows without running any tests first," Matsumoto fumed about the action taken after the central government decided that all cattle inside the no-go zone, within a 20-kilometer radius of the crippled plant, had to be culled. All eight cattle Matsumoto was keeping had to be killed because his farm was inside the zone. "The cattle were supporting me and my family," Matsumoto said as he looked over pictures of what happened after the disaster.

Yaginuma listened to Matsumoto's tale intently, using a video camera to record the interview. "The value of relevant documents goes up with testimonies," explained the professor.

On the same day, he also visited the village's board of education as well as the former municipal Katsurao Junior High School to confirm the existence of whiteboards with plans for March 2011 written on it as well as what was written on the blackboards at the school. The school held a graduation ceremony on March 11 that year, the day of the quake disaster. According to the professor, sometimes it takes months for some residents to build up enough confidence to give him some important papers they have.

Yaginuma's team is collecting just about anything that shows the daily lives of residents before the quake, or items that show what happened in the disaster and the ensuing nuclear accident, as well as materials indicative of post-disaster situations.

In November 2017, Yaginuma and his team visited the prefectural Ono Hospital in the town of Okuma, which is just 4 kilometers away from the nuclear plant and is still included in the "difficult-to-return" evacuation area designated by the government.

On the day of the earthquake seven and a half years ago, the hospital accepted many people injured by the jolt and the subsequent tsunami. But all patients and medical staff needed to evacuate at 7 a.m. the next morning using buses and ambulances after an evacuation order due to the nuclear accident was issued.

Near the clinic's entrance, papers with patients' names and conditions are posted on a whiteboard. Stands to hang intravenous drip bags are also scattered around, reminiscent of the tense atmosphere of the time. "We want to make it possible for people to look back on and study the earthquake and nuclear accident from every angle based on these documents," said Yaginuma.
(Japanese original by Takuya Yoshida, Mito Bureau)

"Temporary clinic"

September 14, 2018

Doctor in town hit by Fukushima nuclear disaster provides faithful support 7 1/2 years on

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180914/p2a/00m/0na/021000c>

NIHONMATSU, Fukushima -- A 76-year-old doctor from the Tsushima district of the Fukushima Prefecture town of Namie, whose residents remain evacuated 7 1/2 years after the 2011 outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, welcomed patients into his temporary clinic here with a smile on Sept. 11 as usual.

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Shunji Sekine previously worked at a national hospital before he moved to his post at the clinic in Tsushima 21 years ago, in 1997. The Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster occurred on March 11, 2011, around the time he was planning to step down and hand his job to a successor. But he still continues to work in the city of Nihonmatsu, about 30 kilometers inland, and has seen many residents become ill or lose their spouses in their prolonged life as evacuees in the city and surrounding areas. The clinic is located on the premises of the "Ishikura complex," a public housing facility in the city of Nihonmatsu, run by the town of Namie. It is frequented by residents of the town who evacuated into the nearby neighborhood.

"You need to take your medicine every day," he explains to one patient. The doctor engages in conversation with his patients during his examinations as he knows most of their family members and friends.

One of his patients is 83-year-old Reiko Konno, who evacuated to the city of Motomiya.

"I look forward to having a chat when I come here," she said. "I feel calm since he's been my doctor for a long time." Konno lost her husband of more than 50 years a year after the earthquake. Amid growing anxiety, she asked how long Sekine would remain at the clinic. He laughed and replied, "I will be here as long as there's a clinic, and everyone's here."

The 76-year-old physician opened up makeshift clinics at places including a government institution and traditional Japanese inn after he was forced to evacuate. He would lay patients on futons and transfer

them in a fire engine when he lacked the necessary medication and equipment and couldn't get an ambulance.

The clinic moved from temporary housing to public housing as reconstruction progressed. It remains the only medical institution in the area that has kept running for 7 1/2 years without ever closing.

Many of Sekine's patients are physically declining faster than their advancing age, and some have already passed away amid prolonged evacuation. Not long after being forced to evacuate, some people who used to be on the move at their farms started using canes and were unable to get out of bed. Others suffered from lifestyle-related diseases as they drank all day. The current situation was unimaginable before the nuclear disaster.

"I want to protect the health of evacuees as long as there's a clinic," says the doctor. He plans to keep watch over the residents whose lives have been tossed about by the nuclear disaster.

(Japanese original by Ryusuke Takahashi, Minamisoma Local Bureau)

Evacuation agreements between municipalities

October 31, 2018

Eastern Japan cities sign nuclear accident evacuation accord

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20181031/p2g/00m/0dm/061000c>

CHIBA, Japan (Kyodo) -- A local government near a nuclear power plant in eastern Japan signed an accord Wednesday that will allow its residents to take shelter in six municipalities further away from the complex in the case of an accident at the plant.

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The arrangement aims to enable **the evacuation of about 43,000 of around 270,000 residents from Mito, Ibaraki Prefecture, which is located within 30 kilometers from the Tokai No. 2 plant, to Kashiwa and five other cities in Chiba Prefecture.**

Under the accord, the **six cities in Chiba** are to set up shelters to be managed by the Mito municipal government. The maximum evacuation period will be one month in principle and Ibaraki Prefecture and Mito will be in charge of securing necessary supplies.

Screenings for radioactive materials and decontamination work will be carried out by the Ibaraki prefectural government.

The nuclear plant located northeast of Tokyo is operated by Japan Atomic Power Co. In September, it cleared a safety screening to resume operations under stricter rules introduced after the March 2011 nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

The conclusion of the evacuation accord met with opposition from civic groups in the six cities which claimed the cooperative partnership could be viewed as a step toward the aging plant's resumption.

The city of Mito has concluded similar accords with municipalities in Ibaraki, Tochigi and Gunma prefectures to evacuate around 180,000 people. It is arranging an agreement to flee the remaining 40,000 residents to Saitama Prefecture.

Eight other municipalities within a 30-km radius of the Tokai No. 2 plant in the village of Tokai, Ibaraki Prefecture, have also signed evacuation accords with local authorities in nearby prefectures.

Schadenfreunde?

September 16, 2018

Foggy Fukushima river tour draws influx of visitors

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/09/16/national/foggy-fukushima-river-tour-draws-influx-visitors/#.W69B7vmYRLN>

Fukushima Minpo

A river tour conducted by rowboat in the town of Kaneyama, Fukushima Prefecture, is becoming popular with tourists for its scenic views of the thick fog covering the quiet waterway.

During the Mugenkyo no Watashi tour along the Tadami River, local photographer Kenko Hoshi leads his guests past the Mifuke district — a community that was lost following a massive landslide over 50 years ago.

Under favorable weather conditions, visitors can travel through the serene setting and take in views of the beautiful fog that blankets the river.

Thanks partly to photos posted on Instagram and other social media sites, visitors to the area had jumped threefold through August compared with a year ago.

The tour was also covered by a major travel magazine, leading to an increase in both individual and group travelers. A further influx is expected in autumn, when the leaves begin to change.

Rowboats were used by Mifuke's residents to cross the river daily. But a landslide in 1964 destroyed the community, turning it into a ghost town.

Deserted houses and abandoned statues of the bodhisattva Jizo still stand untouched 54 years on.

The round-trip crossing, which lasts an hour, includes a short tour of Mifuke during which visitors can experience a kind of time warp back to the lost village.

Kaneyama residents started the tour in 2010 with two boats as a step toward revitalizing the economy.

But they were forced to suspend it in July 2011 because of torrential rain that damaged the region.

After a rebuilt dam stabilized the water levels, the tour finally resumed in April 2017.

Hoshi, 69, is from Mifuke. He has dedicated himself to taking photographs of the Tadami railroad line and the surrounding areas. During the tour, he discusses the Tadami River's charms and the history of his abandoned hometown.

An official at Fukushima Prefecture's tourism promotion office said it is important to note that the town tapped local resources for the project and saw it succeed through social media.

Aizu Bus Group, a local transportation firm, is cashing in on the river tour as well.

In August it launched a new bus route called the Tadami River line and made a bus stop specifically for the Mugenkyo no Watashi tour.

Accommodating the surge in visitors, however, is a challenge. Large tourist buses come on weekends but there are no parking and toilet facilities for the tour, forcing them to rely on a nearby hot springs facility. Moreover, there are only two skippers for the boats, forcing them to turn down some reservations. As the fog often appears early in the morning, it is not unusual for Hoshi to start rowing at 6 a.m. and continue until sunset.

Train runs on the Tadami Line are expected to fully resume in fiscal 2021 after a partial suspension caused by rain damage. Officials say local resources must be developed further to attract rail passengers. "There is a limit to our work. We need to get more skippers and need more infrastructure development," Hoshi said.

This section features topics and issues from Fukushima covered by the Fukushima Minpo, the largest newspaper in Fukushima Prefecture. The original article was published on Sept. 6.

Suu Kyi in Fukushima

October 8, 2018

Myanmar's Suu Kyi visits organic farm in Japan's Fukushima Pref.

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20181008/p2g/00m/0dm/002000c>

FUKUSHIMA, Japan (Kyodo) -- Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi, currently in Japan for a regional summit, visited Fukushima Prefecture on Sunday to tour a farm that employs workers with various disabilities.

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Some rural areas of Myanmar face a serious shortage of farm workers, and Myanmar is seeking solutions to ease the problem.

Suu Kyi visited Cocoroya farmers market and cafe in Izumizaki where she viewed the produce and toured the facility.

The farm grows a variety of vegetables organically and runs a small market selling its produce and a cafe there.

After touring the facility, Suu Kyi said she had learned a lot from her brief visit and expressed her appreciation as well as sympathy to the people of Fukushima, who have gone through difficult times since 2011 when a massive earthquake and tsunami and ensuing nuclear disaster hit the area.

Suu Kyi arrived in Japan on Friday to attend a regional investment forum on Monday and the 11th Mekong-Japan summit meeting Tuesday. She is scheduled to leave Japan on Wednesday after meeting with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Tuesday.

Fukushima rice still favourite for rice balls

October 14, 2018

After 16 years, Fukushima's Aizu Koshihikari still the brand of choice for popular Tokyo rice ball shop

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/10/14/national/16-years-fukushimas-aizu-koshihikari-still-brand-choice-popular-tokyo-rice-ball-shop/#.W8Qz6PmYSos>

Fukushima Minpo

A popular rice ball shop stands near Tokyo Station's Yaesu Central Gate, drawing long lines of customers waiting to buy products made with rice from Aizu, Fukushima Prefecture, known for remaining soft with a touch of sweetness even when it gets cold.

As it takes less than a minute to make the rice balls, customers don't have to wait long at Honnoriya, a rice ball chain operated by JR East Food Business Co.

From actors, athletes and comedians to politicians and culinary maestros, many say they are fans of the rice balls. After it was featured on the popular TBS television show "Matsuko no Shiranai Sekai" ("The World Unknown to Matsuko"), a rush of traffic swarmed Honnoriya's website, temporarily shutting it down.

Sadafumi Yamagiwa, president of JR East Food, said the secret of the chain's popularity is the quality of the rice — Koshihikari rice produced in Fukushima's Aizu region.

"It's because the rice tastes good. The Aizu Koshihikari rice is chewy, making it different from other rice," Yamagiwa said.

The firm uses Aizu Koshihikari in all of its 13 outlets located in Tokyo, Kanagawa, Saitama and Chiba. At the main shop in Tokyo, around 7,000 rice balls are sold on busy days. In fiscal 2017, a total of 252 tons of rice were consumed at its 13 stores.

Since Honnoriya opened its first outlet at Tokyo Station in March 2002, it has continued to use Koshihikari brand. Despite having been awarded the top "special A" ranking by the Japan Grain Inspection Association, Aizu Koshihikari is cheap compared with other varieties produced in different regions, Yamagiwa said.

Following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and the ensuing nuclear meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, many consumers avoided produce from the prefecture. The company also received many inquiries about the safety of the rice, and employee opinions differed over which brand should be used.

But as blanket radiation checks conducted on Fukushima-grown rice found no radioactive material, such concern gradually eased, Yamagiwa said.

He stressed that the company has been using Aizu Koshihikari solely for the reason that it tastes good. "It's not like we've been using the rice to support the disaster-hit regions," he said.

Each year, the company chooses a rice brand after comparing the tastes of different varieties produced in different parts of the country.

For the past 16 years, there has been no rice that surpassed Koshihikari produced in Aizu, Yamagiwa said, meaning that Aizu Koshihikari has consistently won the internal competition every single year.

This section features topics and issues from Fukushima covered by the Fukushima Minpo, the largest newspaper in Fukushima Prefecture. The original article was published on Sept. 30.

"I want to cover my devastated town with flowers"



Genkatsu Sugano is seen caring for dahlias in his flower garden in the Yamakiya district in the town of Kawamata, Fukushima Prefecture, on Aug. 30, 2018. (Mainichi)

October 8, 2018

Man builds flower garden in hometown field after Fukushima evacuation order lifted

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20181008/p2a/00m/0na/002000c>

KAWAMATA, Fukushima -- A 71-year-old man has created a garden in a field in his hometown here following the lifting of the evacuation order for the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, filling the area with colorful flowers.

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- **【Related】** Doctor in town hit by Fukushima nuclear disaster provides faithful support 7 1/2 years on

Genkatsu Sugano, a resident of the Yamakiya district in the town of Kawamata, Fukushima Prefecture, takes care of white and pink dahlias and other flowers in one hectare of land rented from a friend. "While there are some flowers in bloom, others are not ready yet. I want the garden to be filled with flowers," Sugano said with a smile.

On March 11, 2011, when the disaster struck, Sugano, who made a living as a poultry farmer, was suddenly hit by a strong quake near his house. While he and his family were not injured and his house was not damaged, they evacuated to a temporary housing facility in the same town.

When Sugano and his wife visited a flower garden in the town of Kawanishi, Yamagata Prefecture, in October, 2016, he was fascinated by the beautiful flowers in full bloom everywhere. The visit motivated him to grow flowers in his hometown.

In March 2017, when the evacuation order was lifted, Sugano finally returned home after a lengthy absence. He joined a November 2017 gathering for evacuees living near the Yamakiya district and met Koichi Ohashi, 77, a resident of the city of Iwaki in the same prefecture.

Ohashi used to live in the town of Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture, and grew red spider lilies at the side of a road near his home and enjoyed watching the scenery covered with red flowers in autumn. However, Ohashi was forced to move from area to area after the disaster and has lived in Iwaki since 2012. While he gave up returning to his hometown, he has been worried about his red spider lilies.

When Sugano talked about the idea that he wants to make a flower garden in the district, Ohashi asked Sugano, "Could you plant my red spider lilies in your garden?"

Sugano planted some 3,000 red spider lily plants that he received from Ohashi and 5,000 daffodil and 800 dahlia plants.

"I want to cover my devastated hometown with flowers," Sugano added.

(Japanese original by Toshiya Nakamura, Akita Bureau)

Politicisation (and removal) of Sun Child



Controversy Blocks Out Sun Child Statue in Fukushima

<image: >

<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/nhknewsline/backstories/sunchild/>

A statue was removed in September from a busy area of Fukushima City, just a month and a half after it had been set up. The "Sun Child" was created by artist Kenji Yanobe to express his hope for the reconstruction of areas affected by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, and the ensuing nuclear accident.

The statue's fate reflects the mixed feelings Fukushima residents have on the nuclear disaster.

A Sun Child is born

The statue is 6.2 meters tall and depicts a child in a yellow protective suit. It was installed in front of a child-rearing support facility in the middle of the city on July 28th. The Sun Child holds a helmet, smiling as he looks into the distance.

It was created by contemporary artist Kenji Yanobe, a professor at the Kyoto University of Art and Design. He said he wanted the boy taking off his helmet and taking a deep breath to show the air in Fukushima is now clean. He said the radiation counter on the boy's chest shows zero to symbolize a world without nuclear disasters, despite the fact that in reality radiation levels never fall to zero because of natural background radiation. Yanobe also said the sun in the boy's right hand represents his hope for the future and the creation of new forms of energy.

The statue was installed on the eve of my last day at NHK's Fukushima bureau. It was put in front of the building next to the bureau, and I saw it for the first time when I was picking up my stuff at the office. It surprised me, but I never imagined it would cause so much controversy.

Controversy flares

The Sun Child was officially unveiled on August 3rd. It is the first of three identical statues by Yanobe. After debuting at Osaka Expo Park in October 2011, the statue was exhibited across Japan. When it was displayed at the Fukushima airport, the response was so positive that the exhibition period was extended. The statue seemed to have found a permanent home in Fukushima.

But immediately after it was installed, there was controversy. Responses were mixed. City officials received calls from people saying they feared the statue would give the impression that residents of the city had to wear protective suits after the nuclear accident. Others said it could lead to more rumors about the safety of Fukushima. On the other hand, some people said they understood what Yanobe wanted to say, and some said the statue gave them courage.

A survey conducted by the city at the site found 22 respondents were in favor of the statue, while 75 were against. Of the 67 phone calls and messages the city received on the Sun Child, 8 were in favor and 44 were against.

Removal

At first, Fukushima mayor Hiroshi Kohata dismissed the criticism, saying the Sun Child is a symbol of the city's reconstruction. But as the controversy grew, he was forced to change his stance. On August 28th, Kohata announced at a news conference that it was difficult to keep displaying the statue as "a symbol of reconstruction" given the mixed reaction. He said while some residents wanted the statue to stay, many more wanted it gone.

At a city assembly meeting on September 11th, Kohata said he would cut his salary by 10 percent for 3 months to take responsibility for the statue. He pledged to reflect on the failure to build a consensus before the installation, and said it was a lesson in managing municipal government.

Yanobe said at a September 5th press conference that he accepted the city's decision. He added he regretted having rushed to set up the statue without listening to the voices of the people of Fukushima. He said it would be better to discuss the statue after it was removed, given the controversy it had caused. The Sun Child was dismantled and taken away on September 18th and 19th. It was disassembled into 10 parts before being removed. Some came to take pictures as the process began. A man in his 60s said

debate surrounding the statue should not end with the removal. He said citizens need to use this opportunity to discuss how to confront the legacy of the nuclear accident.

City officials say they have no plans for the Sun Child's future.

Yanobe says he is concerned the statue's removal could make other artists cautious of expressing themselves, that they may censor themselves. He says he fears the fate of the Sun Child could make artists think twice before they create work that touches on Fukushima. I felt what happened to the statue highlights the difficulty of expressing the nuclear disaster through art.

Politicization of the Sun Child

I talked to people in Fukushima about the removal and I found that controversy on social media may have complicated the issue and was partly responsible for the removal. One person told me both pro and anti-nuclear activists used the statue for their causes. He told me of a case in which someone ordered peaches, a regional specialty, from a local farmer only to later cancel the order, citing worries caused by the Sun Child. My source suspected it was an elaborate attempt to create an atmosphere where the statue had a sway on dialogue. A few hotels in Fukushima have reportedly received similar cancellation notices.

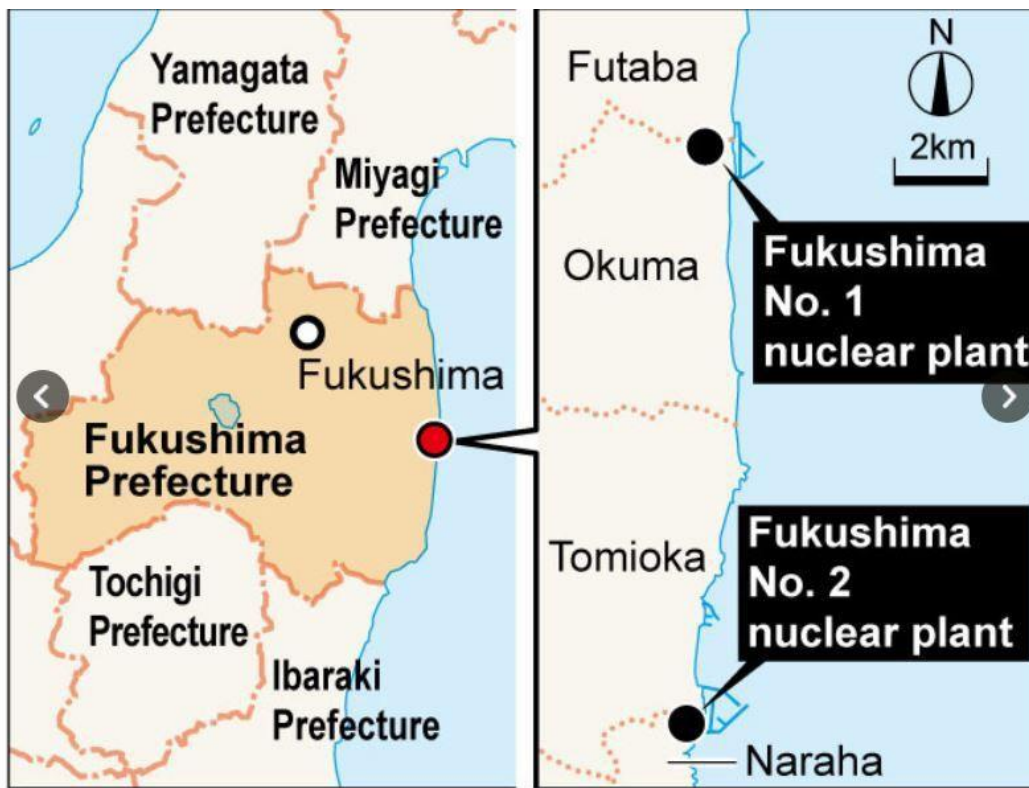
My source says the impact of the controversy on social media played a role in the statue's removal. He says he felt like he had witnessed the dark side of society.

Artistic expression goes on

Does this mean artists should stay away from the theme of Fukushima? Having covered the story, I agree with Yanobe that artists should not be afraid to express themselves. One thing I frequently heard from people in Fukushima was that they feared the number of people paying attention to the nuclear accident would decline. Their biggest worry is being totally forgotten.

How should artists engage with Fukushima from now on? In his statement on the removal of the statue, Yanobe expressed his determination to stay committed to a dialogue with the people of Fukushima. "I take the removal to heart. I want to have dialogues with as many citizens as possible so as to make a fresh start."

Closing Fukushima No.2



The Asahi Shimbun

October 18, 2018

Nuclear plant closure brings hope, despair to Fukushima town

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201810180001.html>

NARAHARA, Fukushima Prefecture--Naraha's anti-nuclear wish has been granted, and now this population-depleted town faces a future without **its main source of revenue and major supplier of jobs**.

In the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011, Naraha decided to oppose nuclear energy and call for the closure of the Fukushima No. 2 nuclear power plant that it co-hosts on the coast of the prefecture.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. in June finally said it plans to decommission the No. 2 plant. Although anti-nuclear activists cheered the decision, not everyone in Naraha was happy. Since the 1970s, the town has been home to the No. 2 plant, which first went into service in 1982.

For decades, Naraha has received central government grants and subsidies for hosting the No. 2 plant, as well as tax revenues from TEPCO and its affiliates operating in the town.

The plant also employed 860 people, many of them from Naraha and its surrounding communities.

Naraha had a population of about 8,000 before the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami caused the triple meltdown at TEPCO's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant in March 2011. The crippled plant is located within 20 kilometers from Nahara.

The quake and tsunami also created a scare at the No. 2 plant by leaving the facility with only a limited power supply from external sources and emergency diesel generators to cool the reactors. But the plant brought the situation under control.

After long remaining silent about the fate of the No. 2 plant, TEPCO decided to retire all of its four reactors, which were approaching their legal operating limit of 40 years.

If the power company wanted to continue operations at the plant, it would have to spend hundreds of billions of yen on upgrades to meet the more stringent safety standards that were set after the accident at the No. 1 plant.

A town assembly session in September was dominated by questions about Naraha's financial status.

"How much in local tax did TEPCO and its affiliates pay the town last fiscal year?" an assembly member asked.

"About 52 percent of the town's overall revenues of 1.93 billion yen (\$17 million)," replied a town official.

"And how much in nuclear energy-related grants from the central government was given to the town?" the assembly member continued.

"About 1.1 billion yen," another official answered.

Naraha will lose its eligibility to receive the grants once TEPCO's plan to decommission the No. 2 plant becomes official.

The assembly member kept pressing the town government for specific plans to secure new revenue sources.

Mayor Yukiei Matsumoto took the rostrum and said, "We will request a new grant from the central government."

Matsumoto was referring to a "special grant" that the central government established after the Fukushima meltdowns to mitigate the financial impact on Okuma and Futaba, the two towns co-hosting the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, and nearby municipalities.

The new grants, which started in fiscal 2015, are intended to supplement their revenues.

A total of about 250 billion yen will be used for the special grants over 30 years.

Under this setup, 8.3 billion yen was paid to the Fukushima prefectural government in fiscal 2016, of which 2.1 billion yen went to Okuma and about 1 billion yen to Futaba in subsidies.

Part of the remainder was used to build training facilities for five sports, including canoeing and clay shooting, in the prefecture, and to renovate greenhouses at an agricultural high school in Aizubange, a town about 120 kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The nuclear disaster at the No. 1 plant forced residents to evacuate Naraha. The evacuation order was lifted in September 2015, but only around half of the town's residents have returned permanently.

Many Naraha evacuees have started new lives in other municipalities. And the town's infrastructure, such as supermarkets and medical institutions, has still not been fully restored to pre-disaster levels.

In Tomioka, the other co-host of the No. 2 plant, less than 10 percent of residents have returned since the entry ban was lifted in spring last year for most of the town.

Although Naraha and Tomioka officials share concerns about their municipalities' financial futures, they see a silver lining in the situation at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Both towns have served as front-line bases for workers involved in decommissioning of the stricken plant.

About 5,000 workers a day who are involved in the decommissioning effort provide steady business for convenience stores and other shops in the two towns.

Business hotels, dorms and apartment buildings have been built in the towns and neighboring communities to accommodate the workers.

Work to dismantle the No. 1 plant is expected to take decades to complete. Local officials said the closure of the No. 2 plant could bring about a similar economic boon.

“Decommissioning can become a major industry,” Naraha Mayor Matsumoto said.

Gubernatorial elections in Fukushima

October 28, 2018

Incumbent Uchibori set to be re-elected as Fukushima governor

https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20181028/p2g/00m/0dm/082000c#cxrecs_s

FUKUSHIMA (Kyodo) -- Incumbent Fukushima Gov. Masao Uchibori is set to secure another four-year term Sunday, beating three challengers, a Kyodo News projection showed.

- **【Related】** Voting under way in Fukushima gubernatorial election

- **【Related】** Anti-nuke power mayor recognized by Time magazine loses re-election

Throughout the election campaign, the 54-year-old governor, who is in his first term, enjoyed a comfortable lead over the other candidates -- Jun Kanayama, 78, a self-employed worker, Sho Takahashi, 30, an IT company owner, and Kazushi Machida, 42, prefectural chairman of the Japanese Communist Party.

While all four candidates ran as independents, Uchibori received support from the ruling and opposition parties, except for the communist party.

The northeastern prefecture, where there are about 1.6 million eligible voters, is still on the road to recovery from the nuclear meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant, which were triggered by the devastating earthquake-tsunami on March 11, 2011.

During the campaign, Uchibori pledged further efforts to rebuild local communities and promote the return of residents who have moved out of the prefecture due to the disaster, but many voters voiced concerns about the candidates proposing few specific measures to help residents recover from the devastation.

Voting under way in Fukushima gubernatorial election

https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20181028/p2g/00m/0dm/024000c#cxrecs_s

FUKUSHIMA (Kyodo) -- Voting is under way Sunday in the gubernatorial election in Fukushima Prefecture, with the incumbent's approach to reconstruction work in the wake of the 2011 earthquake and nuclear disaster having been the major point of debate during the campaign.

- **【Related】** Anti-nuke power mayor recognized by Time magazine loses re-election
- **【Related】** Election Battlegrounds: PM Abe stresses recovery in Fukushima

In the election, incumbent Masao Uchibori, 54, faces three challengers -- Jun Kanayama, 78, a self-employed worker, Sho Takahashi, 30, an IT company owner, and Kazushi Machida, 42, prefectural chairman of the Japanese Communist Party. About 1.6 million people are eligible to vote.

All four candidates are running as independents. But Uchibori, currently in his first term, has received support from the ruling and opposition parties except for the communist party.

The northeastern prefecture is still on the road to recovery from the nuclear meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant, which were triggered by the devastating earthquake-tsunami on March 11, 2011.

Drill at Shimane plant

October 30, 2018

Evacuation drill held near nuclear plant in capital of Shimane Pref.

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20181030/p2g/00m/0dm/083000c>

MATSUE, Japan (Kyodo) -- A nuclear evacuation drill was held Tuesday in the western Japan prefecture of Shimane, which hosts the country's only nuclear plant built in a prefectural capital.

- **【Related】** UN rights expert urges Japan to halt returns to Fukushima
- **【Related】** Mayor of city near Tokai No. 2 nuke plant to oppose reactor reactivation
- **【Related】** Nobel laureate Shimomura dies at 90; remembered for anti-nuke stance
- **【Related】** Dairy farmer resumes operations 7 1/2 years after Fukushima disaster

The drill in the city of Matsue was based on the scenario of a severe accident at Chugoku Electric Power Co.'s Shimane nuclear plant triggered by a powerful earthquake registering upper 6 on Japan's seismic intensity scale of 7.

Of the several hundred residents who participated, 127 evacuated to nearby Okayama and Hiroshima prefectures.

As the Shimane plant is located near a geologic fault, the prefectural government assumed a scenario in which the nuclear plant loses power to cool reactors and spews radioactive materials following the quake. Around 390,000 people live within 30 kilometers of the plant.

"We would have to evacuate residents outside the prefecture because of the large number of residents (living around the plant). We want to enhance the effectiveness of evacuation," said a prefectural government official in charge of nuclear safety measures.

After gathering at community centers and local schools in the morning, residents took buses to the city of Kasaoka in Okayama, around 120 km from the plant and the town of Jinsekikogen in Hiroshima, about 100 km from the plant.

Ichio Tsunoda, the 64-year-old head of a local residents' association, said, "I am worried about elderly and disabled people who would have to remain on a bus for a long time."

At the Shimane plant, the No. 1 unit is being decommissioned and the No. 2 reactor is being screened for reactivation under stricter regulations introduced after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Construction of the plant's No. 3 reactor is nearing completion.

Seeds of hope?



Shi-ome means a junction of sea currents in Japanese. The members gave this name in reference to symbolize the meeting of people through cotton.

November 7, 2018

Sowing seeds of hope in Fukushima

<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/nhknewslines/backstories/sowingseeds/>

By Jun Yotsumoto

People in Fukushima continue to struggle with the fallout from the 2011 earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear triple disaster. It has taken an especially heavy toll on farmers. But some are finding a way forward with a new crop.

It is peak harvest time in Iwaki, a coastal city in Fukushima Prefecture. Rows of cotton are ready to be picked. They represent a future for the region's shattered industries. When I visited the field in October, a team of volunteers from Tokyo were busy picking the brown, fluffy crop under the sunshine. The air carried a hint of autumn. One volunteer told me she had been to Iwaki several times in the past to help with the harvesting, but this year's crop seemed the most abundant.

Cotton farming was not common here before 2011. The disaster devastated the region and its farming industry. Fields were destroyed and there were fears about radiation. The image hurt the region, and consumers stayed away from Fukushima products. Farmers were forced to abandon their jobs, and the fields went fallow.

Some local residents were determined to change the situation and came up with the idea of using the empty fields to grow cotton. They wanted a crop that wasn't food, and they chose cotton after learning it could grow even on the fields that had been left salted by the tsunami. They started the Fukushima Organic Cotton Project in 2012.

35-year-old Yuta Sakai is a key member of the project. He was born and raised in Iwaki. When the disaster struck, his family evacuated. Sakai says he used to think his hometown was boring and would always complain about it. But while he was away, he says his thoughts changed drastically. Seeing all the damage the disaster had done to the city he had known all his life, he realized how dear Iwaki was to him. He says he felt a strong desire to start something new in the city. He quit his factory job and joined the cotton project.

Central to the project is a commitment to organic and eco-friendly cotton made in Japan. They harvest a species of the plant that was brought to Japan about a thousand years ago. The team gets the soil and crops tested for radiation twice a year to confirm the safety.

Local farmers and weekend volunteers helped to reclaim fallow farm land. This has helped the team increase the amount of cotton it harvests by 10 times in the past 6 years. Their success is growing.

In 2014, the team created an original brand of cotton called "Fukushima Siome." Shi-ome means a junction of sea currents in Japanese. The members gave this name in reference to the meeting of tides off the coast of Fukushima, and to symbolize the meeting of people through cotton and a change in the consciousness toward environment. The brand is now used in products sold across Japan.

The project's sales are now four times larger than when it started. Buyers range from a t-shirt and towel manufacturer in Tokyo to major overseas companies. British cosmetics brand, LUSH, started using the cotton in 2016. The company says the material fits with its environmentally-ethical policy. A customer at a LUSH store in Tokyo says the Fukushima cotton makes her want to buy some not just for herself, but also for others to spread the story.

Daisaku Koyama, PR manager for LUSH JAPAN, explains that consumers are increasingly choosing products they consider ethically correct. This trend exists despite the fact that "fair trade" and "organic" products are usually more expensive. Koyama says producing and selling products with stories like Fukushima's is very important for his company. He says LUSH's first priority is conducting business based on ethics, and that this policy has been successful.

British cosmetics brand, LUSH, says the material fits with its environmentally-ethical policy.

Recently, Sakai's team invited cotton businesses from across Japan to Iwaki to hold their annual meeting. The industry thrived in the country until about a century ago. Nowadays, almost all the cotton used in clothes is imported.

Those in the business see organic goods like Fukushima Siome as a way to change the circumstances. One of the participants at the meeting, a cotton farmer from western Japan, says if Fukushima-made cotton becomes more famous, it will draw attention to all Japanese cotton and help the whole industry.

Sakai wants to move forward, too. He surprised his team by telling them he plans to go independent and start his own company with the goal of making cotton a central Fukushima industry.

But the road ahead is rocky. Subsidies for reconstruction have been covering much of the cultivation and labor expenses. But the money is set to expire next year. Still, Sakai says it is as if he's facing his own "Siome" in his life and he is determined.

"We can't stay disaster victims forever now that more than 7 years have passed since the disaster," he says. "It is about time we should remove 'charity' from our project and stop depending on pity. We should restart as professionals that deal with good quality cotton products."

And no matter the difficulties, he says he foresees success. He wants the cotton industry to boost the hometown he once thought was boring. He wants the young generation to be proud of the city.

By planting seeds of hope into once abandoned fields, Sakai is giving Fukushima a future that was hard to imagine 7 years ago.

IAEA wants quick fix to water problem

November 14, 2018

IAEA urges quick plan on Fukushima radioactive water cleanup

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20181114/p2g/00m/0dm/007000c>

TOKYO (AP) -- Experts from the International Atomic Energy Agency urged the operator of Japan's tsunami-wrecked Fukushima nuclear plant on Tuesday to urgently decide on a plan to dispose of massive amounts of treated but still radioactive water stored in tanks on the compound.

- **【Related】** Nuclear experts to test water, fish around Japan power plant
- **【Related】** Contaminated water, fuel extraction stand in way of decommissioning Fukushima plant
- **【Related】** 3 years after new nuclear rules, work continues to evaluate safety of plants

A 13-member IAEA team told reporters in Tokyo after a weeklong review that managing nearly 1 million tons of radioactive water is critical to the plant's safe and sustainable decommissioning.

The IAEA team said in a preliminary report that hundreds of tanks currently used to store the water over large areas of the plant's compound can only be a temporary solution and must be removed "urgently."

The cores of three reactors at the plant suffered meltdowns following a massive 2011 earthquake and tsunami that devastated parts of northeastern Japan.

Radioactive water has leaked from the damaged reactors and mixed with groundwater and rainwater at the plant. The water is treated and stored in large tanks.

More than 7 1/2 years since the accident, officials have yet to agree on what to do with the radioactive water. A government-commissioned panel has picked five alternatives, including the **controlled release of the water into the Pacific Ocean**, which nuclear experts say is the only realistic option. Fishermen and residents, however, strongly oppose the proposal.

That option faced a major setback this summer when the plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co., acknowledged that the water, which it said had been carefully treated, was not clean enough. It said the water contains cancer-causing cesium and other elements in excess of allowable limits for release into the environment.

The IAEA interim report said TEPCO could run out of space for tanks in a few years, and the water storage adds to safety risks and could hamper the decommissioning of the plant, which is already an unprecedented challenge.

It said the water problem has improved recently because of measures such as an underground frozen wall installed around the reactor buildings to keep the radioactive water from mixing with groundwater. It suggested that **TEPCO could further reduce the amount of contaminated water by cutting back on the use of cooling water injected into the reactors because the temperature of the melted fuel has fallen significantly.**

IAEA mission leader Christophe Xerri told reporters that **it is uncertain whether all of the melted fuel can ever be successfully removed because too little is known about the damage to the cores of the three reactors.**

TEPCO and government officials plan to start removing the melted fuel in 2021. Robotic probes inside the reactors have detected traces of damaged fuel but its exact location, contents and other details remain largely unknown.

"If you don't have the information it's very difficult to say it's possible or not" to remove all the fuel, Xerri said.

The team's final report from its review is expected in late January.

See also : IAEA urges quick plan to clean up Fukushima radioactive water

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201811140010.html>

IAEA urges Japan to reach decision soon on handling of radioactive water at crippled Fukushima nuke plant

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/11/14/national/iaea-urges-japan-make-decision-treated-radioactive-water-crippled-fukushima-uke-plant/#.W-v0mzGNyos>

Kyodo

A team of nuclear experts from the International Atomic Energy Agency urged Japan this week to reach a decision quickly on what to do with treated water that contains low toxicity radioactive tritium, which is accumulating at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

“We advised the Japanese government that ... (a) decision should be taken very rapidly for the disposition path for water which is stored in these tanks,” said Christophe Xerri, leader of the 13-member team, on Tuesday following a nine-day review of progress on scrapping the Fukushima No. 1 plant, which was damaged in the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

“There is space limitation, so some solution has to be decided and implemented,” he said, adding that the volume of treated water containing tritium in tanks is expected to reach the planned capacity within the “coming three to four years.”

As of last Thursday around 970,000 tons of tritium-containing water was stored on the premises of the plant, according to Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc.

The government has studied options for the tritium-containing water, including releasing it into the sea, as it is regarded as not harmful to humans. The tainted water has been stored in tanks after being produced as a byproduct of cooling the plant’s reactors, which suffered core meltdowns following the 2011 disaster.

But local fishermen and residents have expressed concern about discharging the water, fearing the potential impact on food.

“Controlled discharge to the sea is something which is applied in many nuclear facilities, so it’s not something which is new,” Xerri said, while adding, “Our review was not to advise the Japanese government on one solution or another one.”

“It is up to the Japanese government to decide — in engaging with stakeholders, of course — on the option Japan wants to implement,” he said.

Toyoshi Fuketa, who heads the Nuclear Regulation Authority, has described discharging the water into the sea as the “only” solution.

Tepeco has been running the Advanced Liquid Processing System, said to be capable of removing almost all radioactive materials from the toxic water except tritium.

It was the fourth such review conducted by a team of experts from the Vienna-based agency, following two in 2013 and one in 2015. The IAEA will issue its final report by the end of January 2019.

Xerri said his team was impressed by the progress that has been made at the plant since the previous review, including the full operation of a frozen soil wall around the reactors that has reduced the volume of groundwater that enters the reactor buildings.

But he acknowledged many challenges in the decommissioning process, which is set to take “30 to 40 years or even more,” including the removal of melted fuel from the reactors — seen as the hardest part.

When asked about the possibility of discarding the fuel — the location and volume of which remaining within the reactors is yet to be grasped due to high levels of radiation — Xerri said, “We don’t have enough information to tell you yes or no.”

Taiwan maintains ban on Fukushima food

November 26, 2018

Taiwan votes to keep ban on foods from Fukushima disaster areas for 2 more years

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20181126/p2a/00m/0na/023000c>

FUKUSHIMA/TAIPEI -- Taiwan voted in a referendum on Nov. 24 to continue its ban on imports of food products from five Japanese eastern and northeastern prefectures, including Fukushima, hit hard by the nuclear crisis, for two more years.

- **【Related】** Fukushima farmers see need to better publicize food safety
- **【Related】** Children to be given priority for iodine tablets against radiation
- **【Related】** IAEA urges quick plan on Fukushima radioactive water cleanup

The outcome of the referendum is expected to deal a serious blow to relations between Japan and Taiwan.

According to tallies, approximately 7.79 million Taiwanese voted in favor of the continuation of the ban on the imports of food products from Fukushima, Ibaraki, Tochigi, Gunma and Chiba prefectures, while about 2.23 million people opposed the continuation. Voter turnout came to 54.56 percent, well above one-fourth required for the outcome to be valid.

The Taiwanese authority is not allowed to implement policy measures against the outcome of a referendum for a two-year period.

Taiwan prohibited the imports of food products from these five prefectures immediately after the outbreak of the crisis at the tsunami-ravaged Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station in March 2011.

In response, the Japanese government has strongly urged Taiwan to lift the ban on the grounds that the safety of such products from these prefectures has been scientifically proven.

The Taiwanese administration of President Tsai Ing-wen considered lifting the ban, but the largest opposition Nationalist Party launched a campaign to provoke a sense of fear among Taiwanese people who are sensitive about food safety and demanded that a referendum on the issue be held.

The exports of agricultural products made in Fukushima Prefecture plummeted to 2.4 metric tons in fiscal 2012 after the outbreak of the nuclear disaster. However, the figure rose to some 210 tons in fiscal 2017, the highest figure since fiscal 2005 when statistics are available, because concerns about the safety of foods produced from the prefecture have been dispelled.

Shin Nagamine, 44, a farmer who grows the Koshihikari brand of rice in the Fukushima Prefecture town of Aizubange, has expressed concerns that Taiwan's latest move could spread harmful rumors about products from Fukushima and surrounding areas throughout the world.

"The move is regrettable all the more because we expected that the lifting of the import ban would be a step toward our disaster recovery. I fear that the harmful rumors could spread to surrounding countries and doors that have been opened could be closed again," he said.

The head of a fisheries cooperative in Fukushima Prefecture has calmly responded to Taiwan's decision. "We can't completely reject Taiwanese people's ideas and force them to ease restrictions on our Fukushima products," said Tetsu Nozaki, leader of the Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Fisheries Co-operative Associations.

Since April 2015, radioactive substances in excess of the upper limit set by the central government have not been detected in fish caught off Fukushima.

Chiba Gov. Kensaku Morita, who visited the Taiwanese city of Taoyuan in November 2017 to ask that the ban on food products from the five Japanese prefectures be lifted, said his prefecture will continue efforts to persuade Taiwan to ease the ban.

"We've tried to convince the Taiwanese public of the safety of local food products and our response to the matter based on scientific grounds. We'd like to continue tireless efforts to win their understanding," he said.

(Japanese original by Hideyuki Kakinuma, Fukushima Bureau, and Shizuya Fukuoka, Taipei Bureau)

November 27, 2018

Taiwan and Japan to hold trade talks in shadow of vote to keep post-Fukushima food ban

https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/11/27/national/politics-diplomacy/taiwan-japan-hold-trade-talks-shadow-vote-keep-post-fukushima-food-ban/#.W_1MmDGNyos

Kyodo

TAIPEI – Taiwan and Japan will hold annual trade talks in Taipei this week, coming after a weekend referendum in the former that could have a negative impact on bilateral relations. [...]

Fukushima & food safety

November 25, 2018

Fukushima farmers see need to better publicize food safety

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20181125/p2g/00m/0dm/049000c>

FUKUSHIMA (Kyodo) -- Farmers and fishermen in Fukushima called for further efforts to convince the public that their food is safe to eat on Sunday after Taiwan decided to maintain its import ban on Japanese food from areas affected by the 2011 nuclear disaster.

Taiwan's public voted in a referendum Saturday to maintain the ban on agricultural products and other food from Fukushima and four other prefectures.

"All we can do is to work harder until people understand that our products are safe," said Masao Koizumi, a rice farmer in Fukushima.

The prefectural government of Fukushima has been conducting radiation checks on all rice produced in the prefecture. Since 2015, all shipments cleared the screening, with radioactive cesium levels below the 100-becquerel-per-kilogram limit set by the central government.

"When people see the inspection readings, they will know that there is no threat of radioactive materials," Koizumi said.

Tetsu Nozaki, the head of an association representing fishery cooperatives in the prefecture, said, "We are disappointed, but we just need to make sure that we keep communicating the safety of our products."

China eases ban on Fukushima foodpracti

November 29, 2018

China eases Japan food import ban imposed after nuclear disaster

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20181129/p2g/00m/0fp/080000c>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- China has relaxed its ban on Japanese food imports introduced after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, allowing rice produced in Niigata Prefecture to be shipped to the country, the Japanese farm ministry said Thursday.

- **【Related】** Taiwan votes to keep ban on foods from Fukushima disaster areas for 2 more years
- **【Related】** Fukushima farmers see need to better publicize food safety
- **【Related】** Hamburger event using Fukushima ingredients held in Tokyo

Imports of rice produced in Niigata Prefecture, north of Tokyo, resumed Wednesday for the first time in seven years at a time when the United States and China remain at odds over trade issues, imposing tariff measures on each other's products.

"We want to welcome the move," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told a press conference on Thursday. "We will continue to encourage (China) to lift or relax the import ban based on scientific evidence," the top government spokesman said.

The relaxation of the ban is still very limited, however, as China still maintains a ban on the import of foods and feedstuff produced in 10 of Japan's 47 prefectures except Niigata-produced and polished rice, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

Other countries, including South Korea and Singapore, restrict food imports due to radiation concerns following the disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant triggered by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami that hit northeastern Japan.

Taiwan has also decided to keep its ban on food imports from five Japanese prefectures intact as a majority of Taiwanese voted in favor of maintaining the regulation in a referendum on Saturday.

Food product exports from Japan to China were about 100.7 billion yen (\$885 million) last year, the third largest after Hong Kong and the United States.

China lifts ban on Niigata rice in place since nuclear disaster

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201811290055.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

China on Nov. 28 lifted its import ban on rice produced in Niigata Prefecture but maintained restrictions imposed since the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster on other food from 10 prefectures.

During their summit in October, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe urged Chinese President Xi Jinping to lift the import restrictions on Japanese agricultural and other products.

China apparently examined the distances and wind directions from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant and decided to remove the ban on Niigata rice.

Japanese private companies have long hoped to resume rice exports to China, which accounts for about 30 percent of the world market for the staple food.

The Japanese government plans to ask the Chinese government to further ease restrictions on other food products.

The Abe administration has been promoting overseas sales of Japanese food products. It has set a goal of 1 trillion yen (\$8.8 billion) as the annual export amount of agricultural, forestry and fishery products, as well as processed food.

But after the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, 54 countries and regions imposed restrictions on food imports from Japan.

Although the restrictions have been gradually eased, eight countries and regions--China, the United States, South Korea, Singapore, the Philippines, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau--still ban imports of certain products from certain areas of Japan, according to the agricultural ministry.

(This article was compiled from reports by Ayumi Shintaku and Takashi Funakoshi in Beijing and Tetsushi Yamamura in Tokyo.)

Virtual "homecoming" for young evacuees



November 27, 2018

Drone footage probably closest evacuees will get to going home

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201811270053.html>

By KAZUMASA SUGIMURA/ Staff Writer

Children living as evacuees are glued to images shot by a drone of their hometown of Futaba during a special presentation at their temporary campus in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, on Nov. 26. (Yosuke Fukudome)

IWAKI, Fukushima Prefecture--With barely no recollections of growing up in Futaba, a town rendered uninhabitable by the 2011 nuclear disaster, 11 young evacuees had a "homecoming" of sorts on Nov. 26.

The children, fourth- to sixth-graders at two public elementary schools who currently study at a temporary campus in Iwaki, 80 kilometers south of Futaba, attended a special 45-minute presentation in a school gym to watch drone footage of the area where they were born.

A satellite feed allowed the pupils to talk to local officials about efforts to decontaminate the once-bustling community.

Futaba was transformed into a ghost town by the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant triggered by the earthquake and tsunami disaster. High radiation levels mean that entry still remains restricted.

The children watched aerial footage of scenic spots shot by drones on three 70-inch monitors. Beautiful images of beaches and mountains in fall colors caused them to lean forward and express amazement.

Fifth-grader, Mao Oyano, 11, who has few memories of living in Futaba as she left at the age of 3, expressed surprise at seeing “many more houses than I expected.”

The children fell silent when eerie images appeared of the wrecked nuclear plant.

Ninety-six percent of Futaba, a town that co-hosts the stricken nuclear facility, is located in a difficult-to-return zone because of high radiation levels and remains uninhabited. Adults must receive permission to enter the area, but children under the age of 15 are not allowed access.

The children were aged between 2 and 4 when they left, and have not set foot in Futaba since then.

Prior to the disaster, Futaba had two elementary schools with 309 pupils. In spring 2014, the town opened a temporary school facility in Iwaki, a coastal city to where many Futaba residents evacuated, but the number of pupils dropped to 31.

The “homecoming” was the school’s first attempt to give the children an opportunity to ponder the tragedy that befell their hometown, according to a school official.

Stop forcing evacuees back!

December 2, 2018

Fukushima evacuees forced back into unacceptably high radiation zones

<https://beyondnuclearinternational.org/2018/12/02/fukushima-evacuees-forced-back-into-unacceptably-high-radiation-zones/>

One man is advocating for their protection

By Linda Pentz Gunter

A UN Special Rapporteur who last August joined two colleagues in sounding an urgent alarm about the plight of Fukushima workers, has now roundly criticized the Japanese government for returning citizens to the Fukushima region under exposure levels 20 times higher than considered “acceptable” under international standards.

He urged the Japanese government to “halt the ongoing relocation of evacuees who are children and women of reproductive age to areas of Fukushima where radiation levels remain higher than what was considered safe or healthy before the nuclear disaster seven years ago.”

Baskut Tuncak, (pictured at top) UN Special Rapporteur on hazardous substances and wastes, noted during a October 25, 2018 presentation at the UN in New York, as well at a press conference, that the Japan Government was compelling Fukushima evacuees to return to areas where “the level of acceptable exposure to radiation was raised from 1 to 20 mSv/yr, with potentially grave impacts on the rights of young children returning to or born in contaminated areas.”



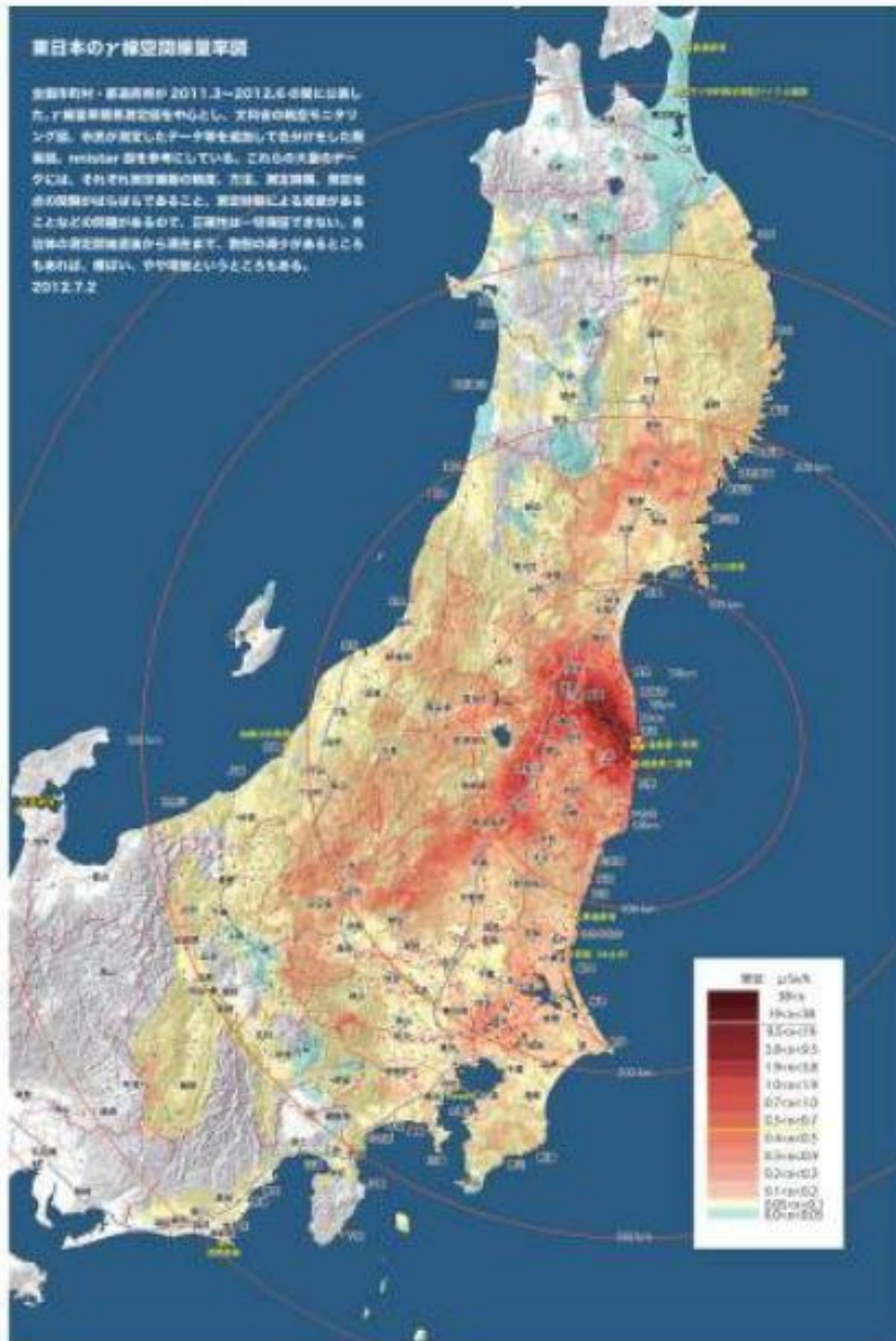
Typical housing for evacuees. 20 m² prefab cabins, evacuation site, Miharu, Fukushima, 46 km north west of Fukushima-Daichi Nuclear Power Plant. (Photo: Lis Fields.)

He described exposure to toxic substances in general as “a particularly vicious form of exploitation.”

In August, Tuncak, along with Urmila Bhoola and Dainius Puras, expressed deep concern about the Fukushima “cleanup” workers, who include migrants, asylum seekers and the homeless. They feared “possible exploitation by deception regarding the risks of exposure to radiation, possible coercion into accepting hazardous working conditions because of economic hardships, and the adequacy of training and protective measures.

We are equally concerned about the impact that exposure to radiation may have on their physical and mental health.”

Now, Tuncak is urging Japan to return to the 1 millisievert a year allowable radiation exposure levels in place before the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi disaster.



2011 map showing wide deposition of radioactive materials from Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. (Courtesy 20 Millisieverts A Year. <https://lisfields.org/20msvyear/>)

In a revealing response to Tuncak's presentation at the UN, the delegate from Japan claimed that 20 msv "is in conformity with the recommendation given in 2007 by the International Commission on Radiological Protection." He also claimed that Tuncak's press release would cause people in Fukushima to

suffer “an inaccurate negative reputation” that was “further aggravating their suffering,” and that the government and people of Japan were “making effort with a view to dissipating this negative reputation and restoring life back to normal.”

This view is deeply characteristic of the Abe government which is desperately attempting to “normalize” radiation among the population to create a public veneer that everything is as it was. This is motivated at least in part by an effort to dissipate fears about radiation exposure levels that will still be present during the 2020 Summer Olympics there, with events held not only in Tokyo but also in the Fukushima prefecture.

However, Tuncak corrected the delegate’s information, responding that:

“In 2007, the ICRP recommended deployment of “the justification principle. And one of the requests I would make for the Japanese government is to rigorously apply that principle in the case of Fukushima in terms of exposure levels, particularly by children, as well as women of reproductive age to ensure that no unnecessary radiation exposure and accompanying health risk is resulting.” Tuncak said Japan should “expeditiously implement that recommendation.”

He also reminded the delegate that “the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council last year, did issue a recommendation to lower the acceptable level of radiation back down from 20 millisieverts per year to one millisievert per year. And the concerns articulated in the press release today were concerns that the pace at which that recommendation is being implemented is far too slow, and perhaps not at all.”

During the press conference Tuncak noted that Japan is a party to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and that forcing evacuees back into areas contaminated to 20 mSv/yr was against the standards contained in that Convention. “We are quite concerned in particular for the health and well-being of children who may be raised or born in Fukushima,” he said.



The Yamagata family in front of their quake-damaged pharmacy in Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, Japan April 12

2011 (VOA – S. L. Herman)

Earlier, Japan had sounded tacit agreement to reducing allowable exposure levels back down from 20 mSv/yr to 1 mSv/yr. But few believed they would carry this out given that it is virtually impossible to clean up severely contaminated areas in the Fukushima region back to those levels.

Bruno Chareyron, the director of the CRIIRAD lab (Commission de Recherche et d'Information Indépendantes sur la RADioactivité), noted in an August 17, 2018 Truthout article that:

“It is important to understand that the Fukushima disaster is actually an ongoing disaster. The radioactive particles deposited on the ground in March 2011 are still there, and in Japan, millions of people are living on territories that received significant contamination.”

Of the cleanup process, Chareyron told Truthout: “The ground and most contaminated tree leaves are removed only in the immediate vicinity of the houses, but a comprehensive decontamination is impossible.” He said in the article that the powerful gamma rays emitted by Cesium 137 could travel dozens of meters in the air. Therefore, the contaminated soil and trees located around the houses, which have not been removed, are still irradiating the inhabitants.

While the UN delegate from Japan claimed that no one was being forced to return and the decision rested with the evacuees alone, Tuncak expressed concern about coercion. “The gradual lifting of evacuation orders has created enormous strains on people whose lives have already been affected by the worst nuclear disaster of this century. Many feel they are being forced to return to areas that are unsafe, including those with radiation levels above what the Government previously considered safe.”



UKRAINE:

- >10 mSv per year: no entry zone
- >5 mSv per year: mandatory migration zone
- >1 mSv per year: the right to migrate zone
- >0.5 mSv per year: entitled to free medical care zone

JAPAN:

- <20 mSv per year: fit to live in zone

Are Japanese more resistant to radiation than Ukrainians?

translated by Hervé Courtois

Recalling his efforts to protect Fukushima workers, Tuncak observed the irony that Japan had admitted that the death of a Fukushima worker from lung cancer was directly related to exposure to radiation at the stricken plant and “quite interestingly, the level of radiation that he was exposed to in the past five years was below the international community’s recommendation for acceptable exposure to radiation by workers.”

Tuncak’s report did not focus solely on Fukushima. It also included exploitation and abuse of Roma people, South Koreans exposed to a toxic commercial product and air pollution in London. During his UN presentation, he observed that “over two million workers die every year from occupational diseases, nearly one million from toxic exposures alone. Approximately 20 workers will have died, prematurely, from such exposures at work by the time I finish my opening remarks to you.”

Before addressing the plight of Fukushima evacuees, he pointed out how “exposure to toxic pollution is now estimated to be the largest source of premature death in the developing world, killing more people

than HIV AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria combined." While noting that this problem exists to a greater or lesser degree the world over, he added that "pediatricians today describe children as born 'pre-polluted,' exposed to a cocktail of unquestionably toxic substances many of which have no safe levels of exposure."

Japan's decision to ignore pleas to halt repatriation of evacuees into high radiation exposure levels usually deemed unavoidable (but not safe) for nuclear workers, not ordinary citizens, will now tragically contribute to these numbers.

Mr. Baskut Tuncak is Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes. *As a Special Rapporteur, he is part of what is known as the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council's independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world.*

Fukushima food ban: Involve WTO?

December 2, 2018

Japan may take Taiwan's Fukushima food import ban to WTO

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20181202/p2g/00m/0fp/055000c>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Japan may take Taiwan's import ban on food products from Fukushima and other prefectures affected by the 2011 nuclear disaster to the World Trade Organization, Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono said Sunday.

"It goes against the WTO's quarantine-related agreement," Kono said, referring to Taiwan's ban on products from Fukushima, Ibaraki, Gunma, Tochigi and Chiba prefectures.

Taiwan voted to maintain the ban in a legally binding referendum on Nov. 25. Taiwanese Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrew Lee said the ministry respected public opinion on the issue and will explain to Japan the safety concerns of the Taiwanese public.

At the WTO, "there is a procedure that allows (a member state) to file a complaint. If necessary, we need to act," Kono told a meeting of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party in Morioka, Iwate Prefecture, in northeastern Japan.

"The WTO sets clear rules that (import bans) should be decided based on scientific foundations," he said.

Following the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, triggered by the massive earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, the prefectural government has sought to ease consumer concern about the safety of farm and fishery products through radiation checks.

Since 2015, all shipments of rice from Fukushima have cleared the screening, with radioactive cesium levels below the 100 becquerel per kilogram limit set by the Japanese government for agricultural, forestry and fishery products. No samples of vegetables and fruit from Fukushima have exceeded the legal limit in inspections since April 2013, and no fishery products have since 2015.

The Japanese chamber in Taiwan, with 471 member companies, has also called on the Taiwanese government to re-examine the ban based on scientific evidence.

As of August, the Taiwanese government has inspected over 125,000 samples of imported food products from Japan since March 15, 2011, with none exceeding the island's legal limits for radiation, according to the Japanese chamber.

Japan is Taiwan's third-largest trading partner, while Taiwan is Japan's fourth-largest trading partner.

On the lookout for looters in deserted Okuma

January 1, 2018

Police officer stays on duty in empty town near Fukushima plant

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201901010014.html>

By TARO KOTEGAWA/ Staff Writer

OKUMA, Fukushima Prefecture--On his rather lonely rounds, Satoru Saeki looks for anything out of place in an empty town center marred by broken windows, uncollected litter and overgrown weeds.

A calendar dated March 2011 is still pinned on a wall of a dilapidated shop.

Saeki, 39, is the only police officer in Okuma, a town that remains largely deserted since an evacuation order was issued following the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011.

On his daily patrols alone in Okuma, which co-hosts the stricken nuclear plant, Saeki is mainly on the lookout for looters.

Saeki works out of the Futaba Police Station in the neighboring town of Tomioka.

On Dec. 4, Saeki, whose hobby is working out, eased his well-built physique into a minicar, his police cruiser. He soon arrived in front of the gate to the "difficult-to-return zone," one of the areas most heavily polluted by radiation that is still essentially off-limits even to residents.

Saeki showed his ID to a security guard before going through the gate. Driving at a speed under 30 kph, the officer looked right and left for unfamiliar cars or any changes to the uninhabited houses.

He arrived at the Okuma town center in about 15 minutes and walked around a shopping district.

Okuma had a population of about 11,000 before the nuclear disaster. Now, it resembles a ghost town.

Construction trucks can be seen going in and out of the town for work to tear down the houses of residents who have decided not to return to Okuma.

Saeki walked some more and found a car parked in front of a house.

“Hello. Has anything changed here?” the smiling officer said to a man in a garden at the home.

“I came back to pick up some things I need because this house is set for demolition,” Hikaru Murai, 69, said.

Murai said he temporarily returned from Aizu-Wakamatsu, also in Fukushima Prefecture, where he has lived since evacuating Okuma, to tidy up his house.

It was only the third time for the two to meet, but they seemed to know each other quite well.

The officer asked Murai what time he started tidying up.

“I got here early because the expressway was so smooth,” Murai replied.

Before the disaster struck, two police officers were assigned to the substation in the Okuma town center. But since it was located in the difficult-to-return zone, the posts were left vacant for a while.

However, evacuees have started staying overnight in their Okuma homes in some areas since spring to prepare for their permanent return. To enforce law and order in the town, Saeki becoming the resident police officer in March this year.

Saeki commutes to the Futaba Police Station from Iwaki, also in the prefecture, where he lives with his family.

A string of break-ins and other crimes have been reported in Okuma.

In 2011, the number of criminal cases in areas under the Futaba Police Station’s jurisdiction was 1,015, more than twice the figure before the nuclear disaster. The number has since been decreasing and stood at 194 in 2017.

“A single case is enough to make residents concerned,” Saeki said.

The officer is adamant about closely liaising with town officials and private security guards, and sharing information no matter how trivial it might seem.

Saeki was born and raised on Shodoshima, an island with a population of about 28,000, in Kagawa Prefecture.

After graduating from college in Kanagawa Prefecture, Saeki became a vocational training school instructor and was assigned to an institution in Iwaki. He married a woman he met in the city and became a member of the Fukushima prefectural police in 2009.

Saeki was on duty when the Great East Japan Earthquake struck and spawned the tsunami that inundated the No. 1 nuclear plant.

He was involved in the search for bodies along the coast.

“It was really hard,” Saeki said. “I made up my mind to support people who made it through even if it means just a little.”

As Saeki continued his patrol in the difficult-to-return zone on Dec. 4, he found many “yuzu” citrus fruit growing on a tree in the garden of a house.

“Oh, it tastes great when you squeeze the juice and pour it into a glass of cocktail,” Saeki said to a resident in the garden.

Citrus fruits are widely cultivated on Shodoshima island.

“Okuma and Shodoshima are similar in the sense that both are rich in nature with the ocean and mountains,” Saeki said.

He said his daily patrols in the town show that recovery will be difficult. But he shared one hope-inspiring event that occurred in early September when the trees started taking on fall colors.

While on patrol in the Ogawara district, where evacuees have started staying overnight at their homes to prepare for their permanent return, a voice called out to Saeki: “Officer, over here.”

When Saeki looked over, he found about 80 evacuees who had returned to the town to enjoy a barbecue party.

“Let’s take a picture together,” one of them said.

With a slightly shy smile, Saeki joined the group for the photo shoots.

Doubts raised about radiation data for Date people

January 9, 2018

Radiation doses underestimated in study of city in Fukushima

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201901090057.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

A nuclear physicist who has drawn attention for tweeting about fallout from the Fukushima nuclear disaster has admitted that he and a colleague underestimated radiation doses in an article for an international scientific journal.

Ryugo Hayano, professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo, said the error, which he recognized on Jan. 8, was “unintentional.”

The article, carried in the Journal of Radiological Protection’s online edition in July 2017, listed average radiation doses that were one-third of the actual levels for people in Date, a city around 60 kilometers northwest of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, he said.

Hayano’s admission came after an atomic nucleus expert contacted the journal last year to point out unnatural data carried in the report and call for a correction.

The radiation doses in the article were based on figures kept by Date residents after the nuclear accident unfolded in March 2011.

“Even if residents lived in the most contaminated area of Date for 70 years, the median of the doses would not exceed 18 millisieverts,” the article concluded.

However, Shinichi Kurokawa, professor emeritus with the High Energy Accelerator Research Organization, an institute jointly used by national universities, raised doubts about the data presented in some sections of the report.

When Hayano and his colleague re-examined the figures, they found that they mistook a monthly dose recorded on a dosimeter as the figure for three months of exposure.

Hayano said the conclusion of the report still stands.

“Even after the error was fixed, I believe the average of annual doses will be within the 1-millisievert mark,” he said.

The benchmark upper limit for radiation exposure among ordinary people is 1 millisievert a year.

Hayano has frequently tweeted about radiation levels and doses from the nuclear disaster.

He was also involved in another research paper that analyzed radiation doses among people in Date.

Kurokawa also questioned the veracity of a chart in the second report.

The second report has often been cited in discussions by the government’s Radiation Council on setting standards for protecting people from radiation.

The two research papers were produced after the Date city government provided Hayano’s research team with data on radiation doses of about 59,000 residents.

But it has emerged that data for 27,000 citizens were provided without their consent.

The city plans to set up an investigation panel to find out why it occurred.
Date has a population of 61,000.

Young girl exposed to radiation of 100 millisieverts (Govt-set standard)

January 22, 2019

Girl, 11, exposed to high radiation levels after 2011 nuclear disaster

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201901220056.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

An 11-year-old girl who evacuated from the town of Futaba after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster was likely exposed to radiation levels near the government-set standard, despite assurances that no children were exposed to such high doses.

The girl is said to have been exposed to a radiation dose of about 100 millisieverts, the threshold for enhanced risk of cancer, following the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The previously undisclosed case, which was reported to The National Institute of Radiological Sciences (NIRS) after the disaster, contradicts the central government's statement that "there has been no confirmed cases of children exposed to radiation doses of 100 millisieverts or higher."

According to the NIRS, the case was not disclosed at the time because the institute considered that the estimate was based on information from the site using a simple monitoring instrument and that the figures were not calculated precisely.

The Fukushima Prefecture town of Futaba co-hosts, along with Okuma, the crippled nuclear plant, which was inundated by massive waves triggered by the megaquake on March 11, 2011.

On around March 17, 2011, a radiological technician of the Fukushima prefectural government office engaged in radiation check-up tests on residents detected 50,000 to 70,000 cpm of radiation when checking the girl's thyroid gland using a radiation monitoring device at a gym in Koriyama, according to the NIRS and other sources.

Cpm, or counts per minute, is a measurement of radiation emitted per minute from radioactive substances detected by such a device.

No documents regarding the case remain, but the figures were conveyed to a team from Tokushima University that traveled to the site to provide support for the tests.

The team estimated that the radiation level in the girl's thyroid gland was likely a dozen kilobecquerels on the assumption that all the radioactive substances were absorbed by her thyroid gland and reported the estimated figures to the NIRS.

A becquerel is a measurement unit that indicates the ability of a radioactive material to emit radiation, or the intensity of radioactivity.

A sievert, in contrast, is a unit that focuses on the effects of radiation on human health.

The NIRS shared the information on the case among its staff members and left memos indicating the dose that **the girl may have been exposed to a radiation dose of around 100 millisieverts**.

Children are said to be particularly vulnerable to thyroid gland cancer due to radiation exposure.

In March 2011, a government survey of 1,080 children in the three municipalities of Iwaki, Kawamata and Iitate in Fukushima Prefecture found a maximum level of 35 millisieverts of exposure, far lower than the 100-millisievert standard.

Promoting Fukushima food in Hong Kong

February 5, 2019

VOX POPULI: Hong Kongers knock back Fukushima sake, despite food ban

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201902050032.html>

About five years ago, I saw a poster at a Japanese restaurant in Hong Kong that declared in large print, "Absolutely no rice or any other food from Fukushima, Japan, used here."

The overly harsh tone made me sigh.

When I visited Hong Kong recently for the first time in many years, I was surprised by the popularity of sake from Fukushima Prefecture. Locals seemed to be thoroughly enjoying "Sharaku," "Toroman" and other noted brands from the Aizu area in western Fukushima Prefecture.

People's perceptions must be changing.

According to a Fukushima prefectural government official, 54 countries and regions around the world imposed restrictions on imports from the prefecture in the immediate aftermath of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, which triggered the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The number is down to 24 today, of which Hong Kong is still one.

Last summer, the government of Hong Kong lifted restrictions on imports from Gunma, Ibaraki and two other prefectures around Fukushima. The last remaining restrictions are on vegetables, fruits and dairy products from Fukushima.

Fukushima Governor Masao Uchibori visited Hong Kong in late January.

Hong Kong was Fukushima's top customer before the 2011 disaster. Eighty percent of the prefecture's agricultural exports went there.

Uchibori strongly asserted the safety of Fukushima's produce, but failed to obtain a commitment from the Hong Kong government to resume imports.

"(Hong Kong's) perceptions about Fukushima (are unchanged), and anxieties, worries and concerns remain deep-rooted," the governor noted.

He must have sensed that acutely from interacting with locals.

When I was stationed in Hong Kong in the past, even for a short while, I was aware of the high trust locals placed in Japanese food.

"It's expensive, but safe," I was told repeatedly.

Perhaps the lingering negative publicity surrounding Fukushima produce is the flip side of the absolute trust people used to have for many years.

Whether at home or abroad, it is hard to focus on a goal when fighting negative publicity. Still, I felt encouraged by how much Hong Kong citizens seemed to be enjoying Fukushima's sake.

This time, I didn't see a single poster proclaiming "absolutely no (Fukushima food)."
--The Asahi Shimbun, Feb. 5

January 26, 2019

Governor promotes Fukushima food in Hong Kong amid post-disaster import restrictions

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/01/26/business/governor-promotes-fukushima-food-hong-kong-amid-post-disaster-import-restrictions/#.XF2wyaBCeos>

JJI

HONG KONG - Fukushima Gov. Masao Uchibori, on a visit to Hong Kong which kicked off Thursday, has worked to promote the safety of food from his prefecture, home to the heavily damaged Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Hong Kong introduced restrictions on food imports from the prefecture after a triple meltdown occurred at Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power station, which was inundated by tsunami following the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011.

Uchibori is the first Fukushima governor to visit Hong Kong after the disasters for the promotion of local food products.

During his stay, Uchibori met with officials of an industry association related to Japanese food. He also paid a courtesy call on a senior Hong Kong government official in charge of import regulations.

The official said that Hong Kong will consider whether to relax the restrictions on Fukushima food while closely watching the pace of recovery in food imports from four nearby prefectures —Ibaraki, Tochigi, Gunma and Chiba — according to Uchibori. Hong Kong eased its restrictions on food from the four prefectures last year.

At a seminar for Hong Kong journalists on Friday, Uchibori stressed that he will redouble efforts to ease concerns over Fukushima food as much as possible, noting that more than 80 percent of all exports of Fukushima-made agricultural, forestry and fishery products had been shipped to Hong Kong before the disasters.

Reconstruction at all costs

February 8, 2019

Japan's Reconstruction Agency to air ad for Fukushima products on TV, online and at cinemas

https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/02/08/national/japans-reconstruction-agency-air-ad-fukushima-products-tv-online-cinemas/#.XF2v_6BCeos

JII

The Reconstruction Agency said Friday that it will run a television commercial advertising farm, fishery and forestry products made in Fukushima Prefecture for about a week from Saturday.

The 30-second spot is aimed at dispelling harmful rumors about the safety of products from the prefecture following the nuclear meltdown at Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc.'s Fukushima No. 1 power plant, which was heavily damaged in the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

The agency hopes to capitalize on rising interest in Fukushima Prefecture ahead of the eighth anniversary of the disaster on March 11.

The commercial, which will also highlight tourism spots in the prefecture, will be broadcast nationwide. It will also be run at movie theaters and online.

The agency has also created a section on its website to explain the current conditions in Fukushima Prefecture, helping visitors to learn about radiation and progress in reconstruction efforts.

"People are losing the purposes of living"



Weeds grow in the parking lot of an abandoned restaurant along Route 6, just outside the exclusion zone around the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, which suffered a multiple-reactor meltdown following a 2011 earthquake and tsunami. (Shiho Fukada for The Washington Post)



THE WASHINGTON POST



A radiation-monitoring device stands in front of Ukedo Elementary School in Namie. (Shiho Fukada for The Washington Post)



A cemetery in Namie that was destroyed after the catastrophe. (Shiho Fukada for The Washington Post) February 3, 2019

Near site of Fukushima nuclear disaster, a shattered town and scattered lives

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/near-site-of-fukushima-nuclear-disaster-a-shattered-town-and-scattered-lives/2019/02/02/0dea7886-1e8c-11e9-a759-2b8541bbbe20_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.f81113baf693

Weeds grow in the parking lot of an abandoned restaurant along Route 6, just outside the exclusion zone around the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, which suffered a multiple-reactor meltdown following a 2011 earthquake and tsunami. (Shiho Fukada for The Washington Post)

By Simon Denyer

NAMIE, Japan — Noboru Honda lost 12 members of his extended family when a tsunami struck the Fukushima prefecture in northern Japan nearly eight years ago. Last year, he was diagnosed with cancer and initially given a few months to live.

Today, he is facing a third sorrow: watching what may be the last gasps of his hometown.

For six years, Namie was deemed unsafe after a multiple-reactor meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant following a 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

In March 2017, the government lifted its evacuation order for the center of Namie. But hardly anyone has ventured back.

Its people are scattered and divided. Families are split. The sense of community is coming apart.

“It has been eight years; we were hoping things would be settled now,” the 66-year-old Honda said. “This is the worst time, the most painful period.”

For the people of Namie and other towns near the Fukushima plant, the pain is sharpened by the way the Japanese government is trying to move beyond the tragedy, to use the 2020 Tokyo Olympics as a symbol of hope and recovery, a sign that life can return to normal after a disaster of this magnitude.

Its charm offensive is also tied up with efforts to restart the country’s nuclear-power industry, one of the world’s most extensive networks of atomic power generation.

Six Olympic softball games and a baseball game will be staged in Fukushima, the prefecture’s bustling and radiation-free capital city, and the Olympic torch relay will start from here.

But in Namie, much closer to the ill-fated nuclear plant, that celebration rings hollow, residents say.

This was a close-knit community of farmers, fishermen and potters — of orchards, rice paddies and cattle sandwiched between the mountains and the sea. It was a place where people celebrated and mourned as a community, and families lived together across generations.

That’s all gone. On the main street, a small new shopping arcade has opened. But a short walk away, a barber shop stands abandoned, its empty chairs gathering years of dust. A sign telling customers to make

themselves at home is still displayed in a bar, but inside debris litters the floor. A karaoke parlor is boarded up. Wild boars, monkeys and palm civets still roam the streets, residents say.

Just 873 people, or under 5 percent, of an original population of 17,613 have returned. Many are scared — with some obvious justification — that their homes and surroundings are still unsafe. Most of the returnees are elderly. Only six children are enrolled at the gleaming new elementary school. This is not a place for young families.

Four-fifths of Namie's geographical area is mountain and forest, impossible to decontaminate, still deemed unsafe to return. When it rains, the radioactive cesium in the mountains flows into rivers and underground water sources close to the town.

Almost eight years after the disaster at the nuclear power plant in Fukushima, the Japanese government is urging people to return, but there's little left. (Simon Denyer/The Washington Post)

Greenpeace has been taking thousands of radiation readings for years in the towns around the Fukushima nuclear plant. It says radiation levels in parts of Namie where evacuation orders have been lifted will remain well above international maximum safety recommendations for many decades, raising the risks of leukemia and other cancers to "unjustifiable levels," especially for children.

In the rural areas around the town, radiation levels are much higher and could remain unsafe for people beyond the end of this century, Greenpeace concluded in a 2018 report.

"The scale of the problem is clearly not something the government wants to communicate to the Japanese people, and that's driving the whole issue of the return of evacuees," said Shaun Burnie, senior nuclear specialist with Greenpeace. "The idea that an industrial accident closes off an area of Japan, with its limited habitable land, for generations and longer — that would just remind the public why they are right to be opposed to nuclear power."

Today, Namie's former residents are scattered across all but one of Japan's 47 prefectures. Many live in the nearby town of Nihonmatsu, in comfortable but isolating apartment blocks where communal space and interaction are limited. With young people moving away, the elderly, who already feel the loss of Namie most acutely, find themselves even more alone.

A sign that reads "Do not enter" hangs along Route 6 in Tomioka near the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. (Shiho Fukada for The Washington Post)

"People are losing the purposes of living. The more time that passes, they feel their dignity as human beings is lost," said Shigeru Sasaki, a former farmer from Namie.

"As a community, we were already suffering from an aging population," said Katsunobu Sakurai, former mayor of the nearby town of Minamisoma. "Now, the damage is more severe because young people are not returning. The elderly who come back feel pessimism and depression. The biggest tragedy now is the high rate of suicides."

Kazuhiro Yoshida, the embattled mayor of Namie, said fears about radiation are not the only reason people aren't returning; many complain the deserted town lacks amenities.

He has managed to get a medical clinic reopened and hopes a supermarket will finally reopen despite the lack of residents. But an elder-care facility remains shuttered because the owner can barely find workers, he said.

"For the past eight years, we have seen the destruction of the area, the destruction of the community, and it will be difficult to bring people back," he said. "But throughout history, we have been through many hardships. If we give up, we would lose our town, and as mayor, I will work with all my heart to prevent that."

But many residents say the central government is being heavy-handed in its attempts to persuade people to return, failing to support residents' efforts to build new communities in places like Nihonmatsu, and then ending compensation payments within a year of evacuation orders being lifted.

"We are upset. Everyone is upset," said Sasaki, the former farmer.

In other towns around the nuclear plant, people have complained that arbitrarily decided compensation payouts — more for people deemed to have been in radiation-affected zones, far less for tsunami victims, nothing for people just a mile outside the zone most affected — have divided communities and caused resentment and friction.

The government is building and fortifying sea walls along hundreds of miles of the Pacific coast to prevent another tsunami from wreaking havoc, but some residents say they weren't consulted and aren't happy about being shut off from the sea.

"This is a place desperate to attract people to return, but this reduces our attractiveness for young people," said Riken Komatsu in the fishing port of Onahama, who is working to rebuild a sense of community and raise awareness about problems with the reconstruction effort.

Komatsu says reconstruction has been imposed from above, a problem he says reflects, in a broader sense, what Japan is like.

"We are going through a second sense of loss because this is not the reconstruction we wanted," he said.

Today, Honda's home, ruined by the tsunami, has been bulldozed to make way for new houses. But none have been built.

"We were driven out of our community, and had it destroyed," he said. "We asked the town and the prefecture to re-create a community for us, away from home, but we were not listened to."

Akiko Kashiwagi contributed to this report.

TEPCO's unacceptable stance on compensation

February 9, 2019

EDITORIAL: TEPCO firmly at fault for balking at payouts to disaster victims

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201902090021.html>

Nearly eight years have passed since the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, yet many victims seeking compensation for damages from Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the crippled nuclear plant, face uncertainty as the talks are getting nowhere. This is an outrageous situation.

The number of cases in which TEPCO rejected an out-of-court settlement proposal from a government body for so-called alternative dispute resolution, or ADR, has increased sharply since last year.

The utility has refused to accept many ADR deals proposed by the Nuclear Damage Compensation Dispute Resolution Center in response to collective requests from groups of residents in areas around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The center was established by the government in 2011 to help settle compensation disputes between TEPCO and victims of the nuclear accident.

In about 20 cases involving some 17,000 residents, TEPCO has refused the center's proposals, causing the ADR process to be canceled.

The residents can either apply for an individual ADR deal to be brokered by the center or file a damages lawsuit. But these steps are time-consuming and costly.

The dispute resolution center, established to facilitate compensation payments to people who have suffered damage from the Fukushima accident, has successfully mediated more than 18,000 settlement agreements, but the institution is now facing a brick wall.

The proposals rejected by TEPCO call for larger payments than the amounts suggested in the guidelines set by the Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation, a committee within the education and science ministry.

TEPCO says it cannot offer an "across-the-board increase" in the amounts of compensation. It also says some of the claims concern issues that are not clearly linked to the accident.

It is clear that the company is trying to prevent its already huge compensation payments from ballooning further.

The utility's stance on this issue deserves to be roundly criticized.

TEPCO has made "three pledges" concerning compensation. It has promised to pay compensation to all victims "down to the last one," ensure "swift and considerate" payments and "respect" settlement proposals made by the dispute resolution center.

But TEPCO has failed to match its words with action. Both the center and the ministry have repeatedly urged the company to fulfill its pledges.

The reconciliation committee's guidelines are important criteria, but they should not be seen as absolute standards that cover all cases and possible changes in damage situations over time.

Even in trials, there is always certain latitude for the findings of fact and the interpretation of rules. This is all the more so for ADR because the approach is designed to promote dispute settlements through simple procedures.

If it really intends to act in line with the spirit of the "pledges" and take responsibility for the dire consequences of the severe accident, TEPCO should accept the center's settlement proposals unless they contain extremely unreasonable elements.

Much of the blame for the situation should also be placed on the government, especially the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, which regulates the electric power industry.

The government has promoted nuclear power generation as a national policy and is now effectively TEPCO's major shareholder.

It should supervise and guide the company with the urgency and vigor required by the situation.

Factors that have aggravated the compensation negotiations include shortcomings in the guidelines. Established shortly after the accident, the guidelines, despite several revisions, are out of tune with the realities of the situations that have grown increasingly complicated and diversified over years due to lasting repercussions from the disaster.

The reconciliation committee should carefully examine the realities and start working to revamp the guidelines. The panel seems to be inclined to wait for court rulings on damages suits filed by some victims. But that would only cause further delays in providing relief to victims.

The committee's own relevance is also at stake.

Compensation must be paid

February 20, 2019

State, TEPCO must pay redress to evacuees from Fukushima

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201902200063.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

YOKOHAMA--The district court here Feb. 20 ordered the government and Tokyo Electric Power Co. to jointly pay 420 million yen (\$3.79 million) in damages to evacuees over the March 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

It held the two parties responsible for the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

This brings to eight the number of rulings in similar lawsuits that found TEPCO responsible for the suffering of evacuees.

Of six similar lawsuits brought against the government, five found the state responsible.

Thirty or so group lawsuits were filed around Japan by evacuees seeking redress.

A group of 175 plaintiffs who moved to Kanagawa Prefecture after evacuating from Fukushima Prefecture because of the nuclear disaster were involved in the suit with the Yokohama District Court.

Presiding Judge Ken Nakadaira ordered the government and the utility to pay 420 million yen in compensation to 125 plaintiffs who fled to Kanagawa Prefecture after being ordered to evacuate from their communities. The remaining 50 plaintiffs fled out of fears for their safety, although no evacuation order was issued.

The plaintiffs had demanded 20 million yen each, in addition to compensation for damage to their homes and other property.

A focus of the court battle was whether the government and TEPCO could have foreseen the possibility of a temblor on the scale of the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake striking the plant, and the likelihood of a power blackout if the coastal complex was inundated by tsunami.

The court found that it was indeed possible as early as September 2009 to predict that towering tsunami could swamp the plant.

The court also said hydrogen explosions that rocked the plant could have been avoided if power systems inside the nuclear complex had been installed in an elevated area, which TEPCO neglected to do.

With regard to the government's responsibility, the court ordered the payout to victims for breaching their right to a peaceful life.

"It could have ordered the company to install power facilities that met certain technological levels, but it failed to do so," the court said.

Plaintiffs welcomed the Yokohama District Court ruling.

Hironu Murata, 76, who led the plaintiff group, called on the government to “address the problem of evacuees responsibly.”

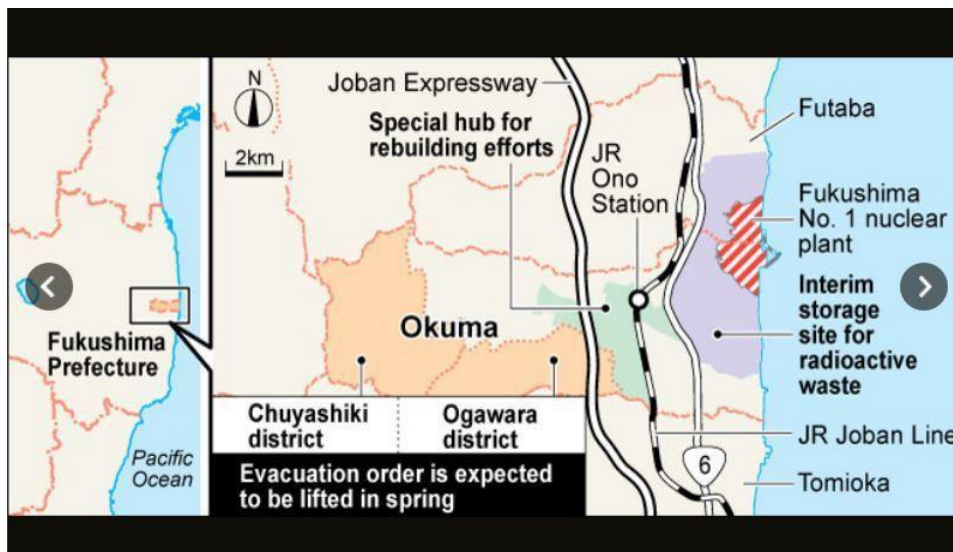
He accused the government of taking measures “based on the premise that the nuclear disaster is over,” but he said, “there is no change in the reality that we must continue to live as evacuees.”

Another plaintiff who evacuated from the Odaka district of Minami-Soma, part of the 20-kilometer no-entry zone from the plant, said her life was upended by the nuclear disaster.

“I had my job and community taken away,” said the woman, who is in her 50s and now lives in Yokohama by herself. “I feel I have been left behind by society. I cannot have a sense of closure unless TEPCO is forced to be held accountable.”

(This article was written by Naoto Iizuka and Hirohisa Yamashita.)

Lifting Okuma evacuation order in April?



February 20, 2019

Host town of crippled nuke plant to lift evacuation order

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201902200049.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

OKUMA, Fukushima Prefecture--An evacuation order will be lifted for two districts here as early as April, eight years after the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant spewed massive amounts of radioactive substances into the air.

It would be the first time for Okuma, which co-hosts the plant, to see the evacuation order lifted, albeit partially.

The Okuma town government, which moved 100 kilometers to Aizuwakamatsu in the prefecture following the disaster, reported at a meeting of town assembly members on Feb. 19 that **conditions in Okuma, including radiation levels, have improved to meet the criteria for lifting the order.**

The town plans to discuss the schedule for lifting the order with the central government and hold a meeting in March with evacuees.

"I want to explain the town's stance in such a way that residents will fully understand," said Okuma Mayor Toshitsuna Watanabe.

The entire town, with a population of 11,500, was ordered to evacuate after the onset of the nuclear crisis following the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

The lifting of the order is expected to cover the **Ogawara and Chuyashiki districts, both southwest of the plant.**

Together the districts account for about 40 percent of the town's acreage. The town's records showed that 374 residents, or about **4 percent of the current population, are registered in the districts, as of the end of January.**

The town government has been preparing for the partial lifting of the evacuation order since April last year.

As of Feb. 7, 46 people have returned to live there as **an advance group.**

In Ogawara, about 700 employees of Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the plant, live in the company's dormitory built in 2016 as a special case and commute to the nuclear complex to engage in decommissioning work.

At the Feb. 19 meeting, a member of the town's committee that assesses the progress of decontamination said, "Radiation levels have declined sufficiently."

The town anticipates that about 1,000 residents will move back to the Ogawara district, where a new town hall is being built, along with about 2,000 people coming from out of town.

However, **the psychological barriers are high for Okuma evacuees, as the town now hosts an interim storage site for radioactive waste produced from decontamination operations in the prefecture.**

Preliminary results of a survey conducted last year to gauge the sentiment of residents showed that only 10 percent of respondents expressed a desire to return. About 60 percent said they had no plans to return.

The town government of Futaba, the neighboring town that co-hosts the nuclear plant, aims to have its evacuation order partially lifted around spring 2020.

(This article was written by Hideyuki Miura and Daiki Ishizuka.)

8 years on

<http://akiomatsumura.com/?p=2525>

Eight years on, Fukushima Still Poses Health Risks for Japanese and American Children

Akio Matsumura

High Radiation Levels Continue at Damaged Reactors

On March 11, 2019, we commemorate the 8th anniversary of the Fukushima nuclear disaster. To an outside observer, this anniversary passes as a technical progress report, a look at new robot, or a short story on how lives there are slowly returning to normal.



A child inspected in Fukushima prefecture, Japan

Yet in Japan, the government has not figured out how to touch or test the irradiated cores in the three crippled reactors, which continue to contaminate water around the site of the melt down. The government does not know where it will put that radioactive material once it can find a way to move it. Meanwhile, the government and site operator are running out of room to store the contaminated water, which is filling up more and more tanks. The cleanup is estimated to take forty years and the cost is estimated at \$195 billion.

The latest publicly released findings of radiation levels are from 2017, when Tokyo Electric Power Company had to use a remote-controlled robot to detect the levels in Reactor 2, since no human can

approach the crippled reactor. The rates read 530 sieverts per hour, the highest since the March 2011 meltdown. We have no reason to believe that they have fallen since then. Remote-control robots are being used in the other reactors as well, indicating that radiation levels are similarly high there. Even using the robot, work can only be carried out for very short times, since the robots can only stand 1000 sieverts of exposure – less than two hours in this case.

This is an extremely high amount of radiation. After TEPCO published the rate, the *Asahi Shimbun* reported that “an official of the National Institute of Radiological Sciences said medical professionals have never considered dealing with this level of radiation in their work.”

The *Japan Times* quoted Dr. Fumiya Tanabe, an expert on nuclear safety, who said that the “findings show that both the preparation for and the actual decommissioning process at the plant will likely prove much more difficult than expected.”

Fukushima’s Children Need International Attention

There have been many victims of this disaster. Thousands of people have been displaced from their homes. Local fishermen are worried that the government will proceed with its plan to dump the storage tanks of contaminated water into the ocean. Others worry that the flow of the radioactive wind and contaminated water are reaching North America and will continue to do so for the next forty years. Above all of these important issues, it is the children of Fukushima who most need our attention. They are at risk of higher rates of cancer because of their exposure to the contamination from the initial explosion. In Chernobyl, the only comparable case we have, more than 6,000 cases of thyroid cancer were found in children according to the UN through 2005.

There is evidence that thyroid cancer rates are higher among Fukushima’s children than the national population, but it is a latent disease: it is still too early to tell what the full impact will be. But it is clear the case needs action.

Scientists will always offer different opinions, swayed first by uncertainty, but also, sadly, by politics, money, and ambition. Some will claim that the evidence has been exaggerated, underestimated, or that perhaps we’re at too early a stage to be certain. Or that we need more time to clarify the results. I have seen many instances of these arguments at the United Nations and international science conferences. Why do we wait and make another mistake?

Helen Caldicott, a medical doctor and founding president of Physicians for Social Responsibility, part of a larger umbrella group that was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1985, wrote: “The truth is that most politicians, businessmen, engineers and nuclear physicists have no innate understanding of radiobiology and the way radiation induces cancer, congenital malformations and genetic diseases which are passed generation to generation. Nor do they recognize that children are 20 times more radiosensitive than adults, girls twice as vulnerable as little boys and fetuses much more so.”

UNICEF Can Lead

We face many complex challenges of climate change, poverty alleviation, and national security. The health and welfare of children must always be our top priority. They are our future; our deepest purpose is to care and provide for them. By deciding not to fully investigate the effects of Fukushima, we fail them.

We all agree with that personally, but which institution is best positioned to carry out the mission? To me, UNICEF, the UN International Children’s Emergency Fund, is the only answer. Indeed, putting children above national security is at UNICEF’s core. Maurice Pate, an American humanitarian and businessman who joined UNICEF at its inception in 1947, agreed to serve as the Executive Director upon the condition that UNICEF serves the children of “ex-enemy countries, regardless of race or politics.” In 1965, at the end of Pate’s term, the organization won the Nobel Peace Prize.

To this day, its mission includes a commitment to “ensuring special protection for the most disadvantaged children – victims of war, disasters, extreme poverty, all forms of violence and exploitation and those with disabilities.” The children of Fukushima deserve the protection of UNICEF.

A new agency for reconstruction



February 12, 2019

New agency eyed to continue work to rebuild from 3/11 disaster

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201902120044.html>

By NORIYOSHI OHTSUKI/ Senior Staff Writer

The government decided to establish an organization to replace the Reconstruction Agency, which will fail to complete many rebuilding projects in the disaster-hit Tohoku region before its deadline of March 2021.

As predetermined by the government, the agency will be abolished around the 10th anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster.

With extra revenue from a special tax introduced in 2014, the budget for Tohoku reconstruction has totaled 32 trillion yen (\$289 billion). The agency had spent 27.4 trillion yen by the end of fiscal 2017.

However, the agency since last year has been looking into the feasibility of completing restoration projects in progress across the region.

As expected, it found that restoration projects in Fukushima Prefecture, home of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co., will take longer than 10 years to complete.

The agency believed that projects in coastal areas devastated by the tsunami that struck on March 11, 2011, were running smoothly. But it discovered that land embankment projects and operations to support the more vulnerable victims of the disaster would not be finished by March 2021.

The central government and the ruling parties agreed that a new organization was needed to continue government involvement in rebuilding the Tohoku region after April 2021.

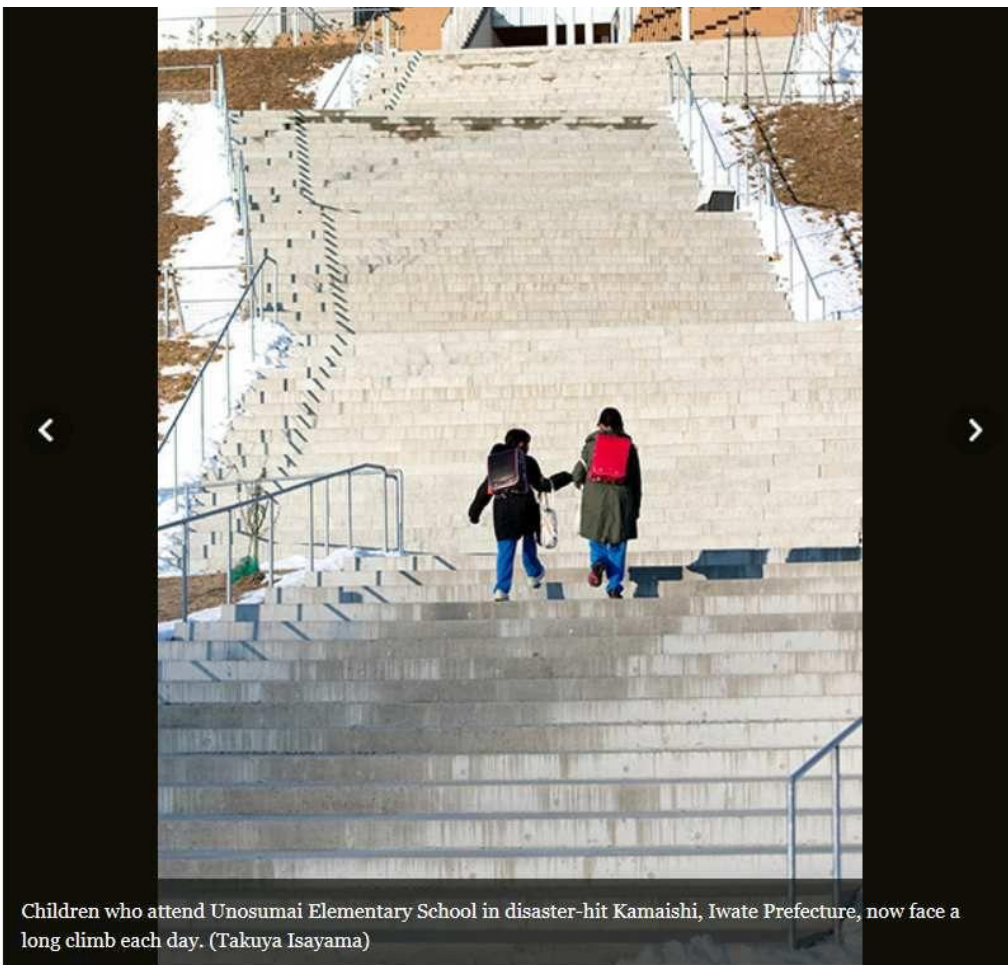
The new organization will take over the abolished agency's budget, which would otherwise essentially become unusable except for some funds carried over for unfinished projects.

Since there is no need for new large-scale public works projects in the region, the new organization will be an affiliated agency under the Cabinet Office, like the Financial Services Agency or the Consumer Affairs Agency, rather than an independent agency. The new organization will be headed by a Cabinet minister.

The Reconstruction Agency was established in February 2012. It has been headed by the prime minister, with its own minister in charge of administrative work.

As of Jan. 1, 520 people worked at the agency, mostly those dispatched from government ministries and agencies, local governments, private sector groups and companies.

Better safe than sorry



Children who attend Unosumai Elementary School in disaster-hit Kamaishi, Iwate Prefecture, now face a long climb each day. (Takuya Isayama)

February 26, 2019

Better safe than sorry: long climb to school in disaster-hit area

By TAKUYA ISAYAMA/ Staff Writer

Children who attend Unosumai Elementary School in disaster-hit Kamaishi, Iwate Prefecture, now face a long climb each day. (Takuya Isayama)

KAMAISHI, Iwate Prefecture--Children enrolled at the Unosumai Elementary School and Kamaishi Higashi Junior High School here face a daily lesson in disaster preparedness.

To reach the school buildings, the kids have to climb a huge number of stairs. In the case of the junior high school, there are 171 steps. The elementary school is located at a slightly lower elevation, so there are fewer. But they still face an arduous upward hike to get to school.

Both school buildings were destroyed in the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake that generated towering tsunami in the Tohoku region.

Incredibly, none of the 570 or so children at the two schools perished, in what is known as the "Miracle of Kamaishi."

However, 580 local residents died or were listed as missing after the disaster.

The school buildings in the Unosumai district facing Otsuchi Bay were rebuilt two years ago. They are now situated at elevations of between 18 and 26 meters above sea level. Some elementary children at the Unosumai school were born after the disaster. The stairway to the schools was made deliberately wide to provide plenty of space for the children and to be conspicuous from the downtown area, allowing the children using it to be a symbol of the area's recovery from the disaster. Yoko Yamakage, 32, is the mother of two children, a daughter who is a sixth-grader in the elementary school and a son now in his first year as a junior high school student. "(My children) head out each day to a safe space. I have such a sense of relief," she said.

Progress?



Construction work continues on an intermediate storage facility for contaminated soil while the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant lies in the background. (Yosuke Fukudome)

February 28, 2019

Survey: 52% in Fukushima see progress toward recovery

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201902280037.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The Asahi Shimbun

For the first time, more than half of residents in Fukushima Prefecture feel that progress has been made toward recovery from the 2011 triple disaster, a survey showed.

But the majority believe that at least two decades will be needed for the prefecture to return to conditions before the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, caused the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, according to the telephone survey conducted by The Asahi Shimbun and Fukushima Broadcasting Co. on Feb. 23-24.

A combined 52 percent of respondents said either some or much progress had been made toward recovery in the prefecture. In contrast, only 7 percent gave those responses in the 2012 survey while the figure rose to 36 percent in the 2016 survey.

A combined 44 percent said little or no progress had been made toward recovery, according to the latest survey, the ninth one conducted.

Asked when they think their lives will return to pre-disaster conditions, 56 percent said “beyond 20 years.” Half of the residents who said some or much progress had been made toward recovery gave this response.

Eighteen percent said “about 20 years,” while 15 percent said “about 10 years” and 4 percent said “about five years.”

A combined 60 percent of respondents said they were very much or somewhat concerned about the effects of radioactive materials released by the triple meltdown.

Seventy-eight percent of respondents said they felt the general public’s interest over victims of the nuclear disaster was weakening.

There was also strong opposition to some measures dealing with the fallout from the nuclear accident.

Sixty-one percent of respondents were against the government’s plan to use contaminated soil with low levels of radiation for public works projects in Fukushima Prefecture. Only 27 percent of respondents supported that move.

Seventy-three percent of female respondents opposed the use of the contaminated soil, compared with 49 percent of men.

The growing volume of water containing radioactive tritium that is difficult to remove is a pressing problem for workers at the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant.

Asked about a plan to dilute the contaminated water and release it into the ocean, 65 percent of respondents were opposed, a slight decrease from the 67 percent who objected in last year’s survey.

Only 19 percent supported the release of diluted water to the ocean, unchanged from last year’s survey.

A combined 87 percent of respondents said they were greatly or somewhat concerned that the release of the diluted water would create negative publicity for Fukushima seafood and produce.

The survey also showed that **Fukushima residents are more opposed to the resumption of nuclear reactor operations than the national average.**

Only 13 percent of the respondents favored reactor restarts while 68 percent were opposed.

A nationwide survey conducted in February found 32 percent in favor of resuming reactor operations while 56 percent were opposed.

Moreover, **65 percent of Fukushima respondents said lessons from the nuclear disaster have not been reflected in the central government's nuclear energy policy.** Only 16 percent said the lessons were being used effectively in nuclear policy.

For the survey, randomly selected landline phone numbers were called, and valid responses were received from 998 residents.

Risk of thyroid cancer in Fukushima 15 times higher than normal



Artikel von Dr. Alex Rosen

15-faches Risiko für Schilddrüsenkrebs

https://www.ippnw.de/no_cache/atomenergie/gesundheit/artikel/de/15-faches-risiko-fuerschilddruesenk.html#c11062

8 Jahre Fukushima

28.02.2019

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Zum achten Mal jährt sich diesen März die Atomkatastrophe von Fukushima. Kinder, die im Jahr der Kernschmelzen zur Welt kamen, besuchen heute die Grundschule, während viele der Kinder und Jugendlichen, die damals radioaktives Jod einatmeten oder mit der Nahrung aufnahmen, mittlerweile junge Erwachsene sind. Es ist viel Zeit vergangen seit den bewegenden Bildern der Explosionen in den Atomreaktoren von Fukushima Dai-ichi im März 2011. Das Thema ist größtenteils aus dem öffentlichen Bewusstsein verschwunden und in Japan mehren sich die Stimmen, die die Ereignisse von damals und ihre Folgen verdrängen wollen. Doch die Atomkatastrophe dauert an.

Weiterhin dringt Tag für Tag radioaktiv kontaminiertes Wasser von den havarierten Reaktorgebäuden in den Ozean und ins Grundwasser. Erst kürzlich musste die Betreiberfirma TEPCO zugeben, die Regierung und die Öffentlichkeit jahrelang über den Zustand des auf dem Gelände gelagerten kontaminierten Wassers getäuscht zu haben. Entgegen Beteuerungen des Unternehmens, dass dieses nur noch den radioaktiven Stoff Tritium enthalte, stellten die japanischen Behörden fest, dass rund 750.000 der insgesamt etwa 890.000 Tonnen Wasser die staatlichen Strahlengrenzwerte um mehr als das hundertfache übersteigen und auch hohe Konzentration an gefährlichen Radioisotopen wie Strontium-90 enthalten. In manchen Proben stellten die Behörden Strontium-90 Konzentrationen fest, die die staatlichen Grenzwerte um das 20.000 fache überstiegen. Erst kurz zuvor hatte TEPCO noch Pläne veröffentlicht, das kontaminierte Wasser in den Pazifik entsorgen zu wollen. Die neuesten Enthüllungen haben diesem Vorhaben erst einmal einen Riegel vorgeschoben.

Gleichzeitig wurden mittlerweile ganze Dörfer und Stadtteile in mühevoller Kleinarbeit vom radioaktiven Niederschlag befreit. Die unwegsamen Wald- und Gebirgsregionen Nordostjapans stellen jedoch ein unkontrollierbares Reservoir an radioaktiven Partikeln dar. Jedes Unwetter, jede Überflutung, jeder Waldbrand und jeder Pollenflug kann bereits dekontaminierte Landstriche wieder mit Cäsium-137 überziehen. So weisen zahlreiche Ortschaften, die nach den Vorstellungen der atomfreundlichen japanischen Regierung längst wieder besiedelt werden sollten, weiterhin erhöhte Strahlenwerte auf. Die Menschen kehren daher auch nicht zurück. Mehr als 50.000 der ursprünglich rund 200.000 Vertriebenen leben auch heute, acht Jahre nach Beginn der Katastrophe, weiterhin in Flüchtlingsheimen und Behelfsunterkünften. Jetzt sollen ihnen die staatlichen Unterstützungen gestrichen werden. So glaubt die Regierung, eine rasche Rückkehr der Menschen forcieren zu können. Der Menschenrechtsausschuss der UN sah sich bereits gezwungen, sich mit der Situation der Vertriebenen aus Fukushima zu befassen.

166 bestätigte Krebsfälle, 38 Kinder warten noch auf OP

Dass Strahlung krank macht, ist nirgendwo so anschaulich zu beobachten wie bei den steigenden Fällen von Schilddrüsenkrebs. Seit 2011 werden bei Menschen in der Präfektur Fukushima, die zum Zeitpunkt der Kernschmelzen unter 18 Jahre alt waren, alle zwei Jahre die Schilddrüsen untersucht. Von 2011 bis 2014 erfolgte die erste Untersuchungsreihe, von 2014 bis 2016 die zweite, von 2016 bis 2018 die dritte und seit 2018 die vierte. Während die Datenaufarbeitung der ersten Runde bereits vollständig

abgeschlossen ist, sind die Daten der zweiten, dritten und vor allem der vierten Untersuchungsrunde bislang noch unvollständig. Dennoch lassen sich aus den derzeit vorliegenden Untersuchungsergebnissen bereits erste Schlüsse ziehen. Ursprünglich begonnen, um die Sorgen der Bevölkerung über gesundheitliche Folgen der Atomkatastrophe zu zerstreuen, haben die Untersuchungen mittlerweile besorgniserregende Ergebnisse zu Tage gefördert.

Laut der Datenbank des Japanischen Krebsregisters betrug die Neuerkrankungsrate (Inzidenz) von kindlichem Schilddrüsenkrebs in Japan vor der Atomkatastrophe rund 0,35 pro 100.000 Kinder pro Jahr. Bei einer pädiatrischen Bevölkerung von rund 360.000 wären in der Präfektur Fukushima somit ca. eine einzige Neuerkrankung pro Jahr zu erwarten gewesen, also etwa 8 Neuerkrankungen seit Beginn der Atomkatastrophe im März 2011.

Tatsächlich sind seitdem bei mittlerweile 205 Kindern in der Feinnadelbiopsie Krebszellen gefunden worden. 167 dieser Kinder mussten aufgrund eines rasanten Tumorwachstums, einer ausgeprägten Metastasierung oder einer Gefährdung vitaler Organe mittlerweile operiert werden. In 166 Fällen bestätigte sich die feingewebliche Verdachtsdiagnose „Schilddrüsenkarzinom“, in nur einem Fall lag ein gutartiger Tumor vor. 38 Kinder warten weiterhin auf eine Operation. Diese Zahlen basieren auf den aktuellsten Veröffentlichungen der Fukushima Medical University (FMU) vom 27. Dezember 2018 und umfassen alle Untersuchungsergebnisse, die bis Ende September 2018 erhoben wurden.

Die FMU teilte in ihrer aktuellen Veröffentlichung zudem mit, dass von mittlerweile 217.513 vollständig untersuchten Kindern (64,6% der gesamten Studienpopulation von 336.669 Betroffenen) bei 141.275 Kindern (65%) Knoten oder Zysten in der Schilddrüse gefunden wurden. Besorgniserregend ist dabei vor allem die Zahl der Pathologien, die bei Kindern gefunden wurden, welche in den Voruntersuchungen noch keine Auffälligkeiten hatten: bei 22.108 Kindern (10%) wurden in der dritten Untersuchungsrunde Zysten und Knoten entdeckt, die in der zweiten Runde noch nicht sichtbar gewesen waren. Bei 135 von ihnen waren die Knoten über 5 mm groß, bzw. die Zysten über 20 mm, so dass weiterführende Untersuchungen notwendig waren. Zusätzlich kam es bei 557 der Kinder, die in der zweiten Untersuchungsrunde noch kleine Knoten oder Zysten hatten, zu einem so starken Wachstum, dass ebenfalls weiterführende Diagnostik durchgeführt werden musste.

Bei insgesamt 54 der Kinder mit auffälligen Befunden wurden in der dritten Untersuchungsrunde Feinnadelbiopsien durchgeführt. Bei 18 ergab sich in der feingeweblichen Aufarbeitung ein Krebsverdacht. 13 dieser Kinder wurden bislang operiert, in allen Fällen bestätigte sich die Verdachtsdiagnose eines Schilddrüsenkarzinoms.

Somit sind seit dem letzten Jahr in der dritten Untersuchungsrunde 5 bestätigte Krebsfälle und 6 weitere Verdachtsfälle hinzugekommen. Etwa 35% der Daten aus der dritten Untersuchungsrunde steht aktuell noch aus, so dass abschließende Bewertungen noch nicht durchgeführt werden können.

Ein Screeningeffekt?

Von Seiten der Atomlobby wird immer wieder versucht, die hohe Zahl an Schilddrüsenkrebsfällen in Fukushima auf den sogenannten Screeningeffekt zu schieben. Dieses Argument mag für die 101 Schilddrüsenkrebsfälle der Erstuntersuchung noch durchgegangen sein, bei den Folgeuntersuchungen

der 2. und 3. Runde ist es jedoch nicht mehr legitim. Die Krebsfälle, die hier detektiert werden, müssen seit der letzten Untersuchung neu aufgetreten sein. Betrachtet man ausschließlich die Schilddrüsenkrebsfälle, die in der 2. und 3. Untersuchungsrunde diagnostiziert wurden, kommt man auf eine Gesamtzahl von bislang 65 neu aufgetretene Schilddrüsenkrebsfälle (52 Fälle in der 2. und 13 Fälle in der 3. Runde). Dies entspricht bei einer untersuchten Studienpopulation von rund 270.000 Kindern und einem Zeitraum von 4,5 Jahren (April 2014-September 2018) einer jährlichen Inzidenz von ca. 5,3 neu aufgetretenen Fällen von Schilddrüsenkrebs pro 100.000 Menschen, die zum Zeitpunkt des Super-GAU unter 18 Jahren waren. Wie oben bereits erläutert, beträgt die übliche Inzidenz dieser Krebsart in Japan 0,35 Fälle pro 100.000. Wir sprechen also in der Präfektur Fukushima von einer Neuerkrankungsrate (Inzidenz), die mehr als 15-fach über der japanischen Norm liegt. Man kann sagen: Menschen, die als Kinder in Fukushima waren als sich der Super-GAU ereignete, haben ein mindestens 15-faches Risiko, an Schilddrüsenkrebs zu erkranken. Dieses Ergebnis ist höchst signifikant und lässt sich aufgrund der eindeutigen Voruntersuchungen aller Patient*innen nicht durch einen Screeningeffekt erklären oder relativieren.

Gleichzeitig muss berücksichtigt werden, dass mehr als 87.000 Kinder der ursprünglichen Studienpopulation nicht mehr nachuntersucht werden, ein Drittel der Daten der 3. Untersuchungsrunde noch ausstehen und alle Krebsfälle, die außerhalb der offiziellen Krankenhäuser diagnostiziert und behandelt werden, gar nicht in der Statistik aufgeführt werden, so dass die Dunkelziffer deutlich höher liegen dürfte.

Schilddrüsenkrebs - eine Bagatellerkrankung?

Angesichts dieser besorgniserregenden Entwicklungen muss daran erinnert werden, dass Schilddrüsenkrebs trotz relativ guter Behandlungsmöglichkeiten und entgegen der Behauptungen der Atomlobby keine Bagatellerkrankung ist und mit schwerwiegenden Einschränkungen der Lebensqualität und der Gesundheit einhergehen kann. Die Operation der Schilddrüse hat bedeutende Risiken, und die Patient*innen müssen lebenslang Medikamente einnehmen, sich regelmäßig für Blutuntersuchungen bei Ärzt*innen vorstellen und leben ständig mit den Angst vor einem Rezidiv. Laut einer Studie der japanischen Stiftung für Kinder mit Schilddrüsenkrebs hatten bereits knapp 10% der operierten Schilddrüsenkrebspatient*innen Rezidive, also neue Krebsgeschwüre, die erneut operativ entfernt werden mussten: bei 8 von 84 betreuten Kindern aus der Präfektur Fukushima kam der Krebs innerhalb weniger Jahre wieder.

Geographische Verteilung der Schilddrüsenkrebsfälle

Bereits letztes Jahr hatten wir darauf hingewiesen, dass sich die Verteilung der Schilddrüsenkrebsfälle bei Kindern mit dem Grad an Kontamination mit radioaktivem Jod-131 in den unterschiedlichen Regionen der Präfektur deckt (siehe www.ipnw.de/commonFiles/pdfs/Atomenergie/Fukushima/SD_Artikel_Fukushima_Maerz_2018.pdf). Am niedrigsten war die Inzidenz von krebsverdächtigen Biopsiebefunden mit 7,7 Fällen pro 100.000 Kindern pro Jahr in der am wenigsten radioaktiv verseuchten Region Aizu. Mit einer Inzidenz von 9,9 Fällen pro 100.000 Kindern pro Jahr lag an zweiter Stelle der Teil von Hamadori, der ebenfalls nur eine geringe radioaktive Verseuchung aufweist. Höher war die Inzidenz in der stärker radioaktiv verseuchten Region Nakadori (13,4 Fälle pro 100.000 Kindern pro Jahr) und am höchsten in den 13 am stärksten

verseuchten Ortschaften rund um das AKW (21,4 Fälle pro 100.000 Kindern pro Jahr). Diese Inzidenzen dieser Studie beziehen sich nicht ausschließlich auf operativ bestätigte Fälle sondern schließen auch die Verdachtsfälle in der Biopsie mit ein und liegen daher höher als die oben aufgeführten Inzidenzen.

Versuche, die Schilddrüsenkrebsstudie zu entwerten

Den Verantwortlichen der FMU scheinen diese Daten unangenehm zu sein, widersprechen sie doch der seit Beginn der Atomkatastrophe verbreiteten These, dass der mehrfache Super-GAU zu keinen zusätzlichen Krebserkrankungen führen würde. Die FMU steht seit Beginn der Atomkatastrophe unter großem politischen Druck von Seiten der atomfreundlichen Regierung in Tokio und der mächtigen Atomindustrie im Land. Auch erhält sie finanzielle und logistische Unterstützung der internationalen Atomlobby in Form der IAEA. All dies stellt die wissenschaftliche Unabhängigkeit der FMU in Frage.

Bereits letztes Jahr hatten wir darauf hingewiesen, dass die Schilddrüsenuntersuchungen seit längerem durch die FMU selber unterminiert werden. So sollen die Untersuchungsintervalle entgegen ursprünglicher Pläne und Ankündigungen ab dem 25. Lebensjahr von 2 auf 5 Jahre ausgeweitet werden. Zudem wurde bekannt, dass Mitarbeiter*innen der FMU Schulen besuchen, um dort Kinder über deren „Recht auf Nichtteilnahme“ und „Recht auf Nichtwissen“ aufzuklären. Neuerdings gibt es auf den Formularen auch eine entsprechende „opt-out“ Option, also eine Möglichkeit, aus dem Screening entfernt zu werden. Dies ist bemerkenswert, da die Teilnahme ja ohnehin freiwillig ist und bereits jetzt 20-30% der Kinder aus der Untersuchungskohorte nicht an den Untersuchungen teilnehmen. Kritisch wird auch gesehen, dass die Kosten für die Untersuchungen ab Erreichen des 18. Lebensjahres nicht erstattet, sondern von den Patienten und deren Familien selbst erbracht werden müssen. Es ist zu vermuten, dass die Bemühungen der FMU darauf abzielen, die Teilnahmequote weiter zu reduzieren und durch eine systematische Verzerrung der Testergebnisse langfristig die gesamte Studie zu entwerten – eine Konsequenz, die der japanischen Atomindustrie nicht gerade unlieb sein dürfte.

Auch muss erneut darauf hingewiesen werden, dass die Zahlen der FMU lediglich einen Teil der tatsächlichen Krankheitslast abbilden. Strahlenbedingte Erkrankungen jenseits des Schilddrüsenkarzinoms werden ebenso wenig erfasst wie Erkrankungen bei Patient*innen, die zum Zeitpunkt der Kernschmelzen älter waren als 18 Jahre, die außerhalb der Grenzen der Präfektur gemeldet waren oder die seither umgezogen sind oder sich aus eigenen Beweggründen nicht an den Erhebungen beteiligt haben. Ein weiterer Umstand, der zeigt, wie die offizielle Statistik manipuliert wird, ist das Herausrechnen von Schilddrüsenkrebsfällen die an Krankenhäusern diagnostiziert wurden, die nicht der FMU angehören. Anfang 2017 ging die Familie eines an Schilddrüsenkrebs erkrankten Kindes an die Öffentlichkeit und monierte, dass der Fall ihres Kindes in den offiziellen Daten der FMU nicht auftauchte. Die Studienleitung argumentierte, dass die Diagnose des Kindes nicht durch sie gestellt worden war, sondern durch eine kooperierende Klinik, an die der Junge zur weiteren Diagnostik und Therapie überwiesen wurde. Dass der Junge zum Zeitpunkt der Kernschmelzen in Fukushima gelebt hatte, in die Reihenuntersuchung der FMU aufgenommen war und aufgrund einer neu diagnostizierten Schilddrüsenkrebserkrankung operiert werden musste, wurde von der Studienleitung dabei nicht für relevant gehalten.

Ende Dezember 2017 wurde ein weiterer Fall von Schilddrüsenkrebs bekannt, der in den offiziellen Statistiken der FMU nicht vorkommt. Der Patient lebte zwar zur Zeit der Kernschmelzen in der Präfektur

Fukushima und nahm an der Erstuntersuchung der Universität statt, wurde jedoch aus seiner Heimatstadt Koriyama evakuiert, so dass die Diagnosestellung und die Operation außerhalb der Präfektur statt fanden und somit nicht in die offizielle Statistik aufgenommen wurde.

Wie viele weitere Fälle von Schilddrüsenkrebs bei Kindern ebenfalls nicht berichtet wurden, wie viele Fälle außerhalb der Grenzen der Präfektur auftraten oder bei Menschen, die zum Zeitpunkt der Kernschmelzen bereits über 18 Jahre alt waren - all das wird wissenschaftlich nicht untersucht und damit vermutlich nie bekannt werden.

Das Recht auf Gesundheit

Wir sehen in Fukushima einen signifikanten Anstieg der Neuerkrankungsraten von Schilddrüsenkrebs bei Kindern und diese Zahlen dürften aufgrund der besonderen Abhängigkeit der Studienleitung von der Atomlobby und der restriktiven Auslegung der Studie gleichzeitig eine systematische Unterschätzung darstellen.

Zudem wird auch mit einem Anstieg weiterer Krebsarten und anderer Erkrankungen gerechnet, die durch ionisierte Strahlung ausgelöst oder negativ beeinflusst werden. Die Schilddrüsenuntersuchungen der FMU stellen die einzigen wissenschaftlichen Reihenuntersuchungen dar, die überhaupt relevante Aufschlüsse über die gesundheitlichen Folgen der Atomkatastrophe von Fukushima liefern können. Und sie laufen derzeit Gefahr, von den Befürwortern der Atomenergie unterminiert zu werden.

Die Bewohner von Fukushima und die Menschen in Japan haben ein unveräußerliches Recht auf Gesundheit und auf ein Leben in einer gesunden Umwelt. Die Untersuchungen kindlicher Schilddrüsen kommt dabei nicht nur den Patient*innen selber zu Gute, deren Krebserkrankungen frühzeitig detektiert und behandelt werden können, sondern der gesamten Bevölkerung, die durch die freigesetzte Strahlung beeinträchtigt wird. Die korrekte Fortführung und wissenschaftliche Begleitung der Schilddrüsenuntersuchungen liegen somit im öffentlichen Interesse und dürfen nicht durch politische oder wirtschaftliche Beweggründe konterkariert werden.

Dr. med. Alex Rosen
Vorsitzender der IPPNW

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Foto: Ayotos Mutter sammelt alle Unterlagen über Untersuchungen und Strahlenbelastung ihres Sohnes,
Foto: Ian Thomas Ash

Dispiriting enrollment

March 1, 2019

Schools refitted in Fukushima, but enrollment remains dismal

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201903010026.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Local governments in Fukushima Prefecture have spent billions of yen to create ideal education environments, including new or renovated school buildings, high-tech classes, free lunches and uniforms, and long-distance buses.

But these schools may be forced to close down. There just aren't enough children in areas near the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant to sustain their operations.

The enrollment figures have dispirited local government officials, who agree that schools and their students are the key to recovery from the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident.

"The laughter and healthy faces of children provide hope to the local communities," Fukushima Governor Masao Uchibori has said.

The Fukushima prefectural government in April 2018 reopened eight elementary and six junior high schools after evacuation orders were lifted for most of Katsurao village in June 2016 and partially lifted for four other municipalities in spring 2017.

One of the reopened schools was Yamakiya Elementary School in Kawamata, which provides classes in computer programming to operate drones.

The school, however, will likely have to close its doors again when the new school year starts in April.

Currently, the school has six teachers for five students, all of whom are sixth-graders who will graduate soon.

No new students indicated an interest in attending the school as of the Feb. 28 deadline for applications.

The school is located in a mountainous area about 50 kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

On Feb. 7, school and town education board officials held an explanatory session for parents who reside outside of the school district. One parent was given a personal tour of how the school environment has been improved.

About 1.1 billion yen (\$9.9 million) was spent to repair the school building. An indoor pool was constructed, and tablet computers are available for all students.

But the parent declined to commit to the school.

Local demographics are working against the local education officials.

The Yamakiya district of Kawamata has a population of about 330 people, and only one has not yet reached school age.

Yamakiya Junior High School, which has 10 students, uses the same buildings as the elementary school.

But the junior high school will also receive no first-year students in April, meaning it will have only three third-year students for the new school year.

With no new students, the junior high school could also be forced to shut down from the 2020 school year. Schools that reopened in April 2018 in the four other municipalities face similar problems.

The 14 reopened schools expect a total enrollment from April of 119 students, a decline of 11.9 percent from last year.

The municipalities have taken enormous steps to attract students. They spent a total of 9.3 billion yen to construct or repair buildings for the 14 schools. Uniforms and lunches are provided free, and some municipalities operate free school buses for students who live away from the community.

However, only 135 students were enrolled in the 14 schools in April 2018, just 3.4 percent of the number who attended the same schools before the 2011 accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Various factors have led to the parents' decisions not to have their children return to the schools in their former communities.

Some families who evacuated have established new lives in new locations. Others remain concerned about the effects of radiation on their children's health.

And some worry about the small number of students attending the schools.

The three elementary schools and one junior high school in Iitate have a total enrollment of 75, by far the largest number among the five municipalities.

About 80 percent of those students live outside of the village. Iitate officials operate 12 buses and cars to take those students to the schools from their new homes.

All school supplies, uniforms and gym clothes are provided free to the students.

Katsurao village, with a population of about 1,400, also covers all educational expenses for the 18 students attending two schools. In addition, households that reside in the village are given monthly subsidies of 20,000 yen for each child 15 years old or younger.

Although a Katsurao education board official said such measures were intended to display the many advantages of attending school in the village, there has been no noticeable increase in students.

(This article was compiled from reports by Hiroki Koizumi, Hiroshi Fukatsu and Daiki Ishizuka.)

Trying to revive fisheries



March 3, 2018

THE MARCH 11 DISASTER 7 YEARS ON REVIVING THE FISHERIES

Sunday, March 3 0:10/ 6:10/ 11:10/ 18:10

<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/special/episode/201903030810/>

7 years ago, a huge earthquake hit the Tohoku region of northeastern Japan. The fishery industry sustained heavy damage from the quake and the tsunami that followed. Reactor meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant led to the spread of radiation. People became nervous about the safety of seafood. We followed the 7-year-long journey of the locals striving to overcome various challenges, including a fisherman trying to regain consumers' trust and business owners trying to expand overseas.

How to erase scars?



Yoko Kimura, left, with her daughter Junko, eats lunch during a brief visit to her home in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, in January. The area remains designated as a difficult-to-return zone, and a brief visit requires permission from the town. Residents are permitted to stay only from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. (Yosuke Fukudome)

March 5, 2019

Scars are there, but Fukushima residents trying to pick up pieces

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201903050058.html>

By YOSUKE FUKUDOME/ Staff Writer

Nearly eight years have passed since their lives were uprooted by the Fukushima nuclear disaster, but evacuees are slowly returning to pick up the threads of their former lives and making small, but incremental steps, in the process.

The magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake that struck on March 11, 2011, generated towering tsunami that swamped the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, triggering a triple meltdown when tons of cascading seawater knocked out its cooling systems.

The scars of that awful time are difficult to erase, and plain to see in so many ways.

“I’m not doing anything special here, but the air is fresh and it makes me feel calm,” said Yoko Kimura, 90, during a brief visit back to her home in Okuma in January.

Her house is located just 4.7 kilometers away from the crippled nuclear facility. Kimura and her daughter Junko, now 67, were among residents living within a 10-kilometer radius of the power plant who were ordered to evacuate immediately to escape massive amounts of radiation spewing into the atmosphere. Kimura's home is located in an area still designated as a “difficult-to-return zone.”

But with permission from town authorities, she returns to Okuma for brief visits twice a month or so, accompanied by her daughter.

The house is without running water and electricity, so Kimura draws water from a well and relies on power from solar panels installed on the roof.

The January visit was her first homecoming this year. In a hallway, where sunshine streamed in, Kimura ate a rice-based meal that she had prepared in Iwaki, where she lives as an evacuee.

Readings of spatial radiation in her garden are between 3 to 4 microsieverts per hour, meaning there is no prospect of the evacuation order being lifted anytime soon.

"My only wish is to die here." When Kimura said that, she was smiling.

Tomioka, another town located in close proximity to the nuclear accident site, lifted the evacuation order for most areas two years ago.

Hiroki Sato, 32, an evacuee in Iwaki, rebuilt his home in Tomioka and tries to spend weekends there with his family whenever he can.

"I don't suffer any inconvenience and I have no worries about my life here," said Sato, as his children enjoyed playing in front of his new two-story home.

Sato intends to relocate to Tomioka when his oldest son, Seiru, 10, enters junior high school.

Namie, too, partially lifted its evacuation order two years ago. The town's population numbered in excess of 20,000 before the disaster, forcing a mass evacuation. Now, only 900 or so people live there.

Kazuki Oshimizu, 31, is one. He returned because he said he genuinely loves Namie.

Oshimizu reopened his izakaya, a Japanese-style bar named "Kondokoso," six months ago. Since then, it has become a place filled with laughter on an otherwise quiet street corner among vacant lots.

Prior to the disaster, Oshimizu could purchase all his needs in town. But nowadays, he sometimes has to drive 50 kilometers to pick up stock.

He acknowledged that it is "grueling not to be able to do things I used to without any problems."

While residents have started returning to many towns in the area where evacuation orders were initially issued, time seems to stand still in places such as Futaba, a neighboring town that co-hosts the nuclear plant with Okuma.

At Futaba-Minami Elementary School, classrooms remain untouched since the moment the earthquake hit. Satchels and other remnants are scattered where they fell. Children were immediately evacuated to the schoolyard, then forced to leave.

The school has reopened in a temporary campus in Iwaki, but the number of pupils has dropped to 15 from 192.

(Yosuke Fukudome has been assigned in the Tohoku region for four and a half years, visiting many disaster-stricken areas, particularly Fukushima, to take photographs to document the lives affected by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster.)

Throwing out records

March 4, 2019

Survey: Many of 42 entities tossed out records from 2011 quake

By MITSUMASA INOUE/ Staff Writer

Eight years after the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, the majority of the 42 municipalities in the three most affected prefectures **have or may have disposed of official documents related to the disaster.**

The municipalities in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures reported throwing out the records because **there were no unified rules on their preservation,** according to an Asahi Shimbun survey. The survey spotlights the necessity of seeking measures to preserve official documents, which were made at the time of the disaster or during the reconstruction process, to the fullest extent possible. Hiroshi Okumura, professor of historical materials at Kobe University, said that such documents could show the circumstances at the time of disasters and how the central and local governments and residents responded, regardless of how long they had been kept.

“(Therefore) **it is necessary to preserve them as long as possible as documents to prepare for future disasters,**” he said.

The Public Records Management Law took effect in April 2011, a month after the twin disasters that hit the three prefectures of the Tohoku region and surrounding areas.

Based on the law, the Cabinet Office required the organizations of the central government in 2012 to appropriately preserve their documents related to the disaster.

In notifying them of the requirement, the office said that preservation of those documents is “a historically important policy to share the records as a state and a society.”

However, local governments were not subject to the order.

The Asahi Shimbun conducted the survey of the 42 municipalities in January and February.

The municipalities were preserving their respective disaster-related documents based on the law or their internal policies.

The survey asked the municipalities if they had discarded some of those official documents as their preservation periods had expired.

Six municipalities replied that they have discarded some of the documents, and 16 other municipalities responded that they may have discarded some of them.

The documents that have already been discarded included notifications from the central government and **lists of names of volunteer workers.**

As for why they disposed of the documents, Tagajo city of Miyagi Prefecture said, “The preservation period had expired.”

Iitate village in Fukushima Prefecture said, “We don’t have space to preserve all the documents.”

The survey also asked the 42 municipalities about whether they have documents they plan to discard after their preservation periods expire.

Twelve municipalities replied that they have such documents and 17 answered that they have not yet decided how to deal with those records.

Many of the 42 municipalities were leaving management of the official documents up to their respective divisions.

Therefore, what is important for the preservation is whether each municipal government decided as a whole to preserve the documents and when it made the decision, if it decided to preserve them.

For example, Kesenuma city in Miyagi Prefecture decided in 2018 that it would not discard the documents for the time being. That means that it could have chosen to dispose of them before 2018.

Meanwhile, Kamaishi city in Iwate Prefecture, which replied that it has not discarded any documents of the kind, decided in 2012 to permanently preserve all its disaster-related records.

In addition to official documents, memos written by municipal government employees, records written on whiteboards and photographs are also important records of the disaster.

However, 10 of the 42 municipalities replied that they were not preserving those type records. Okumura acknowledged the difficulty for each municipality to do so, given the constraints of space and manpower.

“(Because of that) it is necessary for the central and prefectural governments to establish systems to support municipalities, such as securing space for them or dispatching their employees for the job of preserving the documents,” he said.

How many will return?

March 9, 2019

Most evacuees under 50 from three Fukushima towns near nuclear disaster have no plan to return

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/03/09/national/evacuees-50-three-fukushima-towns-near-nuclear-disaster-no-plan-return/#.XIPeHLjjLyQ>

Kyodo

FUKUSHIMA - A majority of people under age 50 who had lived in three towns close to the site of the 2011 Fukushima No. 1 nuclear disaster have no plans to return, an official survey showed Saturday.

Many former residents of Futaba, Namie and Tomioka say they have established new lives elsewhere and that their adopted hometowns are more convenient.

The three towns were subject to government evacuation orders in the wake of the crisis at the plant, which was triggered by a magnitude 9.0 earthquake and ensuing tsunami.

The orders for Namie and Tomioka were partially lifted in 2017. But more than 60 percent of evacuees from the two towns in their 20s and 30s and more than 50 percent in their 40s said they would not return, with other major reasons cited including concerns over the lack of medical and commercial facilities. Regardless of age group, 49.9 percent of former Namie residents and 48.1 percent of former Tomioka residents said they would not return.

As for Futaba, which hosts part of the crippled nuclear plant and remains off limits for residents, similar proportions of those in the 20s, 30s and 40s said they would not return, and the overall figure, regardless of age group, stood at 61.5 percent.

The survey, conducted between August and November last year in cooperation with the Reconstruction Agency and Fukushima Prefecture, included answers from 7,500 households across the three towns and suggests a grim outlook for the municipalities as they struggle to rebuild and attract younger people.

Speaking ahead of the eighth anniversary on Monday of the quake and tsunami that left more than 18,000 people dead or missing and led to the world’s worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl, an official at the agency called for steps to make the town more attractive.

“There is a limited number of residents willing to return,” the official said. “We need to create an improved employment environment to attract newcomers.”

"Recovery Olympics", really?

March 10, 2019

'Recovery Olympics' moniker for 2020 Games rubs 3/11 evacuees the wrong way

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/03/10/national/recovery-olympics-moniker-2020-games-rubs-3-11-evacuees-wrong-way/#.XIUMrLjLyQ>

by Magdalena Osumi

Staff Writer

This is the fourth in a series examining how the northeast and the nation are progressing with efforts to deal with the March 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear crisis.

ISHINOMAKI, MIYAGI PREF. - The town of Rifu on the outskirts of Sendai is set to host 10 soccer matches during the 2020 Olympics and Paralympics in line with the organizers' plan to tout the games as the "Recovery Olympics."

For Rifu, expectations are high the 2020 Games will draw international attention and lure more tourists, as Tohoku's tourism sector struggles to recover from the Great East Japan Earthquake and ensuing tsunami on March 11, 2011. As part of the plan, an arena in Miyagi Prefecture is set to get a face-lift for the games.

"It's an honor for us to host such a large-scale event," said Fumitsugu Komatsu, who manages the facilities selected to host soccer matches in 2020.

The central government hopes the quadrennial sports event will serve as a platform to show that the nation has recovered from the disasters.

But recovery wasn't one of the original themes for the Tokyo Games. The concept was added when it became apparent Tokyo wouldn't be able to secure all the venues needed in the capital or its vicinity.

When organizers thus turned to the disaster-hit prefectures of Miyagi and Fukushima, which will host the softball and baseball games, the recovery spin was born, with officials saying the event would contribute to reconstruction.

Moreover, the reconstruction plan for the Tohoku region is expected to end when fiscal 2020 closes in March 2021, putting an end to various central government subsidies that helped both victims and municipalities.

"The Tokyo 2020 Games have become a goal for us to show the region has recovered," said Yasuki Sato, a Miyagi Prefecture official tasked with coordinating the preparations.

But residents in the area view the preparations as something happening in the background. In fact, some believe they are actually hindering the region's recovery.

Setsuo Takahashi, a resident of Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, whose house was swept away by tsunami eight years ago, is among the skeptics.

"Cheering the victims through sports is a good idea," he said. "But the Olympics have nothing to do with the people who live here. It's a different world, unreachable for us."

What most concerns Takahashi, who is now living in a new house he built in a residential area for the evacuees, is that preparations are taking priority over reconstruction, slowing the process.

Masahiko Fujimoto, a professor at Tohoku University's Graduate School of Economics and Management, said the affected areas may be losing workers to businesses in Tokyo, including for construction projects related to the games.

"The Olympics are, in part, negatively affecting the local economy. The event won't have any impact on the coastal towns," he said.

Indeed, the coast of Ishinomaki, dotted with trucks and cranes, remains largely under construction to restore damaged areas.

"Eight years on, this is still where we are," Akinari Abe, a member of Tohoku University's Volunteer Support Center, said last month as he looked out over the city from Hiyoriyama Park.

"We don't want anybody to tell lies that Tohoku has recovered," said Abe, 30. "People need to realize that the reality isn't so rosy." Many people here worry that after the Olympics, the Tohoku region, with all its struggles, will be forgotten."

The calamity killed at least 15,897, injured 6,157 and left over 2,500 unaccounted for, according to police figures. In addition, of the 470,000 forced to evacuate in the immediate aftermath, 51,778 remained unable to return to their homes as of Feb. 27, according to Reconstruction Agency data.

Nearly all of the 30,000 homes planned for relocation are ready to go in the hardest-hit prefectures of Miyagi, Iwate and Fukushima, plus five neighboring prefectures, including Aomori, Ibaraki and Chiba.

With the infrastructure nearly finished, the focus has shifted to the mental and physical well being of the victims, especially the elderly, many of whom are having difficulty adjusting to new environments after their community bonds were severed.

Former fisherman Koetsu Kondo, 76, moved into a residential complex in Ishinomaki near the Oppa River in October 2017.

"This is my second home now," Kondo said as he covered himself with a quilt from his *kotatsu* (heated table) at his home in late February. His wife, Yoko, opted not to discuss her experience with the calamity. Before March 2011, the family had lived in a tiny hamlet on the coast. Although their home survived the tsunami, which in some places exceeded 30 meters, the liquefaction damage made returning to the area too risky.

Kondo said he has learned to accept his fate and that he's trying to pick up the pieces of his life. He says he's lucky he has someone to lean on as most of the other evacuees have no one to turn to.

Takahashi, the Ishinomaki man who lost his house and now lives across the street from Kondo, is helping him cope with the grief of losing relatives. The grief runs so deep that Kondo said he chose to rent an apartment near Takahashi so he wouldn't have to cross paths with his cousin, who lost his eldest son and wife in the tsunami.

"I can't look him in the eyes — it's too painful," he said. "They say time's a healer but that's a lie. Wounds only deepen with time. Before I go to sleep I still see their faces."

Kondo knows that for elderly men coping with traumatic events, starting anew in unfamiliar surroundings can be too much to bear. Yet he feels he has no choice.

So far, Ishinomaki has built 65 public housing complexes for disaster victims, and 4,456 new apartments are expected to be finished by the end of the month.

"But the construction of public housing is just a step forward toward recovery. The recovery process requires a support network to ensure a sense of security," said Hiroaki Maruya, a professor at Tohoku University's International Research Institute of Disaster Science who specializes in social systems for disaster mitigation. "The real recovery process starts after the survivors settle down."

The municipalities in the region are well aware of the challenge.

“We’re concerned that such turmoil in their lives will exacerbate stress-related health problems; we worry this may lead to the rise in solitary deaths and suicides,” said Hiroshi Oka, manager of Ishinomaki’s recovery planning section, adding that stress-related problems are prevalent in seniors.

The Ishinomaki Municipal Government has launched a campaign to prevent suicides through medical consultations, including relaxation classes and other forms of support. The city also periodically conducts checkups on evacuees in the designated recovery districts.

According to Oka, data shows that the health of an evacuee begins to deteriorate after spending a year in a new neighborhood. Oka said some 80 percent of the evacuees in the recovery districts live alone or with only one family member.

Financial problems add to their struggles by preventing them from moving out of temporary housing. Ishinomaki’s plan calls for having everyone in temporary housing moved to so-called recovery housing — apartment complexes instead of makeshift shelters — by the end of March. But as of the end of February, 807 Miyagi residents, including 203 in Ishinomaki, had yet to do so, their governments say. Subsidized rent for the new facilities will be terminated at the end of March 2021.

The authorities say they are now seeking ways to assist the evacuees from that point on.

“The 10-year period we had thought would suffice doesn’t seem enough” to help communities recover, said Tomoharu Terashima, who manages one of the recovery task forces from Miyagi Prefecture.

“Reconstruction has taken too much time, so we’re asking ourselves if after 10 years we can pull the plug,” he said.

The Reconstruction Agency, which was set up to coordinate reconstruction efforts after 3/11, will also soon be dissolved. The Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Ministry and the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry are expected to absorb its projects.

Experts warn of more challenges ahead.

Maruya, the Tohoku International Research professor, said the biggest problem is that many people fled areas that were already struggling with shrinking and rapidly graying populations. Most have no plans to return.

“Those who have left and settled down, found new jobs and sent their children to new schools won’t come back just like that” despite the new housing facilities, elevated ground and restored infrastructure, he said.

“Because people are not coming back, it may all be in vain.”

The entire community, in fact, will likely disappear, Maruya said.

“For a region already struggling with rapid graying and depopulation before March 2011, it won’t be possible to bring back the population or restore industrial prosperity.”

Michio Ubaura, a Tohoku University professor with expertise in regional and urban reconstruction, says the disaster-hit areas are home to an aging population and a growing number of vacant homes — the same challenges other towns in Japan face.

The quake and tsunami, however, accelerated these demographic woes, forcing small towns in the region to deal with them decades earlier.

“Projections from before the disaster are becoming reality 10 or 20 years earlier than predicted,” he said.

“What we’ll see in a decade is what we had expected to see in 30 years.”

When night falls in Ishinomaki, lights can be seen dotting the area around some of the aging temporary housing units where those who can’t afford to leave still live.

In contrast, a huge cauldron that was kept alight throughout the 1964 Tokyo Olympics has been put on display nearby as a symbol of recovery ahead of the 2020 Games.

“The previous Olympics gave us hope for a better life,” said Takahashi. “But the 2020 Games we can’t afford to take part in will only benefit Tokyo.”

This is a series examining how the northeast and the nation are progressing with efforts to deal with the March 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear crisis.

Bleak symbol of chaos



Patients waited for rescue on more than 30 mattresses in a hall of Futaba Hospital in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, following the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster. (Masahito Iinuma)

March 13, 2019

Signs of chaos, misery frozen at hospital near Fukushima plant

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201903130071.html>

By MASAHITO IINUMA/ Staff Writer

OKUMA, Fukushima Prefecture--First came the excruciating wait for rescue.

Patients were sprawled on makeshift bedding scattered on the floor of a hall at Futaba Hospital. Many were stuck there for days without running water or electricity.

And then came the frantic rush to flee. When rescue buses arrived, several of the patients left behind unfinished drinks and other garbage around their disheveled bedding.

Some of them would not survive the bus ride to safety.

Signs remain of the chaos that ensued at the hospital after the disaster started at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant eight years ago.

All is now quiet around the deserted brown-brick hospital, located in Okuma, a town that co-hosts the Fukushima nuclear plant.

Entry to the highly restricted area around the hospital, which lies just 5 kilometers southwest of the stricken plant, requires permission from the town government.

A white iron gate blocks the hospital entrance. Trees and withered grass that broke through the asphalt in the courtyard have grown to about the height of an adult. The parking lot contains piles of rusted hospital beds that were used to bring patients to the buses.

Inside, wheelchairs, plastic bottles, towels, buckets and paper plates are strewn on the floor of a corridor near the entrance of the medical treatment wing.

The scene in the hall where the patients awaited evacuation underscores the miserable and desperate conditions they endured.

Comforters, blankets and sheets remain messed up on more than 30 mattresses. Half-finished plastic beverage bottles, empty packages of Castella sponge cakes and torn pieces of toilet paper are scattered on the floor.

Stains on the bedding indicate that some patients were too weak to seek privacy to relieve themselves.

Traces of excrement also appear on the floor.

The hospital's director, Ichiro Suzuki, stayed at the hospital to tend to the patients after the disaster. He died at the age of 84 in January this year.

It took five days to complete the evacuation of the hospital largely because of miscommunication and poor coordination between the Fukushima prefectural government, prefectural police and the Self-Defense Forces.

Forty-four people, comprising patients who were waiting at Futaba Hospital and residents of an affiliated nursing-care home, died on the way to or at their new shelters.

On March 12, closing arguments were heard at the Tokyo District Court in the trial of three former executives of Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Former Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata, 78, and two former vice presidents, Ichiro Takekuro, 72, and Sakae Muto, 68, are charged with professional negligence resulting in injuries and the 44 deaths. They are suspected of failing to take measures to safeguard the nuclear plant against a tsunami of a predictable height.

The six-story, 350-bed hospital was treating 338 patients before the disaster struck.

Decayed and rusted over the years, the hospital is now a bleak symbol of the chaos and desperation in the Tohoku region in March 2011.

Harvesting rice in Fukushima



Rice is harvested in October in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, where an evacuation order is expected to be lifted as early as this spring, eight years after the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. (Asahi Shimbun file photo)

March 11, 2019

EDITORIAL: Reset needed so Fukushima can rebuild from nuclear disaster

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201903110026.html>

Eight years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake triggered a disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant on March 11, 2011.

A shadow continues to be cast on the sentiment of the residents of Fukushima Prefecture by a negative public image due to radiation fears and fading public interest in the aftermath of the disaster.

With few inhabitants returning, communities surrounding the crippled nuclear plant are facing tough challenges. In many other areas, radiation readings have dropped to normal levels, and measures to ensure food safety with respect to radiation have been working effectively.

However, misunderstandings and overall anxiety linger, mostly outside Fukushima Prefecture, about contamination by radioactive fallout and its negative impact on health.

People do not know enough about the current state of the northeastern prefecture. On the contrary, they have less and less opportunities for learning about it.

NEGATIVE IMAGE, FADING INTEREST

Distress and discord persist in Fukushima Prefecture.

There is, for example, the question of what to do with the ever-growing volume of low-level radioactive water accumulating on the grounds of the stricken nuclear plant. Another issue concerns how to scale down the ongoing blanket testing of all bags of rice produced in Fukushima Prefecture.

Regarding the contaminated water, the government supports a plan to purify and pour it into the ocean. But fishermen's groups and residents who are concerned about possible negative publicity effects remain strongly opposed, and no clue is in sight to a solution.

Negative publicity is, in fact, hindering rebuilding efforts. The output value of farm products from the prefecture is only 90 percent of its pre-disaster levels. The tourism industry is also still recovering. Farm crops and fish from Fukushima Prefecture are allowed to circulate only after their safety has been confirmed through rigorous checks. No rice produced in 2015 or later has been found to contain radioactive substances in excess of safety standards.

But all that has yet to end consumer pullback.

In a survey taken last month by the Consumer Affairs Agency, some 13 percent of respondents said they hesitate to buy products of Fukushima Prefecture because of possible radioactive content. About 45 percent said they did not know that food products are being screened for radiation.

At the root of the problem is the fact that knowledge of, interest in and the sense of assurance about matters of radiation differ greatly from person to person.

"As public interest in Fukushima Prefecture has faded with time, there is probably a considerable broad base of people who have a vaguely negative image getting fixed in their minds," said Yasumasa Igarashi, an associate professor of sociology with the University of Tsukuba, who is well-versed in the issue of radiation and food.

OVERCOMING DIFFICULTIES

There are many hurdles to clear before overcoming the negative publicity.

Officials of public administrative bodies and relevant industries continue to send out messages about scientific knowledge of radiation, and safety measures being taken against it.

Trying to spread facts is certainly an important approach, but there is a limit to what can be done with that alone.

Fukushima Prefecture products should first be put at store fronts before they are actually bought by a majority of consumers who are not particularly anxious about radiation. Distributors should be positive about setting due value on the products they handle.

It is also essential for suppliers to improve on the taste and other positive qualities of their products to enhance their images.

That said, some are still feeling vaguely anxious, while others are so sensitive to radiation risks that they are consciously shunning products from Fukushima Prefecture. There is a rift and friction between those consumers and the producers in the northeastern prefecture.

Distrust of public administration officials and experts who are handling nuclear power and radiation countermeasures spread across our society following the nuclear disaster. Eight years on, no stage has yet been set for making cool-headed discussions on issues concerning radiation and negative publicity and for seeking solutions that would be acceptable to a broad audience.

But a clue is seen in Fukushima Prefecture to how that deadlock could be overcome.

SURMOUNTING 'DIVIDES'

Riken Komatsu, a 39-year-old community activist based in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, has been working on a program for five years now.

The participants take a boat and go fishing in the waters off the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. Their catch is tested for radioactive concentration, and the figures are released to the public.

About 30 similar measurement sessions have so far taken place. Literally "in the same boat" have been several hundred individuals of differing beliefs and backgrounds, including citizens concerned about

radiation, public administration officials, experts, campaigners against nuclear power and those supporting rebuilding efforts.

Komatsu said he realized, through his activity, that people can be moved at heart.

In those who are feeling “vaguely anxious” about radiation, the combination of hands-on experience and data has generated a sense of heartfelt understanding, and they have switched to being “vaguely assured.” While fishing together, everybody laughs a lot, whatever their stances.

Komatsu said he is trying to ensure that he is bringing fun to the fore to draw people’s interest.

“Getting more people involved in the Fukushima issue without limiting the scope of the audience generates power for fighting the negative public image and the fading public interest,” he said. “I believe that having a common experience could offer a clue to surmounting ‘divides.’”

Regarding the consequences of the nuclear disaster, there are many intersecting axes of divides: one separating those who are concerned and not concerned about radiation; another separating evacuees who return and do not return to their home communities; and yet another separating those who believe and do not believe there should be nuclear power generation.

Violent invectives are being exchanged online. Many have come to see the issue as “touchy.” Even in Fukushima Prefecture, it is perceived as embarrassing to raise the subject in daily life.

Such a situation is making it even more difficult to clean up after the disaster, including in the decades-long process of reactor decommissioning, and to rehabilitate regional communities of residents who have gone asunder.

It is, however, a vital responsibility imposed on our entire society to eliminate the pain brought about as a result of a national policy of promoting the use of atomic energy. It will remain a key question for us on how we will face up to the Fukushima issue.

We should first learn about the affected communities as they are now and update any information and images we have of them. We could then reinstate an environment where things that have gone awry are disentangled one by one so that people can make constructive discussions while respecting the ideas of others.

We hope to see society press a restart button so Fukushima Prefecture can tread on a clear path of rebuilding.

--The Asahi Shimbun, March 10

Abe not always convincing

March 11, 2019

Eight years on, Abe says 3/11 recovery nearing 'final stages,' though half of public unconvinced

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/03/11/national/eight-years-abe-says-3-11-reconstruction-nearing-final-stages-though-half-public-unconvinced/#.XIZNu7jjLyQ>

by Tomohiro Osaki

Staff Writer

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said Monday that Japan is approaching the “final stages” of its effort to rebuild areas devastated by a magnitude 9 earthquake and tsunami in 2011, as the nation marked the eighth anniversary of the biggest disaster in its postwar history — which left more than 20,000 dead or unaccounted for.

A moment of silence was observed nationwide at 2:46 p.m., the fateful minute when the Great East Japan Earthquake jolted many parts of Japan and subsequently triggered a killer tsunami that engulfed large swaths of the Tohoku region, including the three hardest-hit prefectures of Miyagi, Iwate and Fukushima. Eight years on, Abe was confident like never before in the steadfast manner in which reconstruction is taking place. Whereas he previously said reconstruction was proceeding “step by step,” this year he ditched the language of a gradual recovery and instead adopted a more definite tone.

That decision was notable given that a recent opinion poll showed nearly half of respondents nationwide saw little or no progress in the reconstruction.

Speaking at a state-organized memorial ceremony in Tokyo, Abe said efforts to rebuild the affected regions are “making visible progress,” before declaring: “In areas that were affected by the earthquake and tsunami, the reconstruction is advancing toward its final stages.”

The death toll from the magnitude 9 quake and ensuing tsunami — plus numerous aftershocks in the months following — hit 15,897 as of Friday, including 9,542 in Miyagi, 4,674 in Iwate and 1,614 in Fukushima, according to National Police Agency statistics.

That figure would be higher if combined with deaths triggered by stress and illness stemming from the disaster, which the Reconstruction Agency put at 3,701 as of December.

Separately, the latest NPA statistics also show that 2,533 people are still unaccounted for, which is also likely to boost the final death toll.

Despite signs of recovery, about 52,000 people remained displaced nationwide as of February, including those consigned to prefabricated temporary housing, hospitals and dwellings of relatives and friends, according to statistics compiled by the Reconstruction Agency. Residents in Fukushima, where the nuclear meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant took place — the world’s worst nuclear crisis since the 1986 Chernobyl accident in Ukraine — are one of the most affected, with 9,322 still unable to return home.

At the ceremony, Abe acknowledged the plight of those forced to endure “uncomfortable” lives for an extended period of time.

But at the same time, he touted moves toward “full-scale reconstruction” — a phrase absent from last year’s speech — in Fukushima, citing the lifting of evacuation orders in almost all areas except for neighborhoods designated as “difficult to return home” due to exposure to high-level radiation from the plant.

Morihisa Kanoya, a disaster survivor who spoke at the ceremony as a representative of Fukushima Prefecture, said “many challenges” need to be overcome to fully reconstruct his hometown, Namie, which is located close to the plant.

Those include “repairing the damage caused by the earthquakes and the tsunami, as well as solving issues surrounding residents who were evacuated from their homes and the problem of radiation,” he said.

Masaaki Konno, a survivor from Miyagi, said memories of the grotesque aftermath of the disaster — including the “smell of countless rotting fish that had been cast ashore” — remain etched in his mind.

Konno, who lost his mother to the tsunami, said there remains a “gaping hole” in his soul because of “the feeling of powerlessness, and the sadness, agony and despair of not being able to find her.”

Also present at the nationally televised memorial service in Tokyo was Prince Akishino, who, like Abe, hailed “steady” and “extensive” advances in the process of recovery from tsunami and nuclear disasters. The prince elaborated on the heartache he said he feels at the thought of many of those still unable to return home due to the high concentration of radiation in Fukushima, the resulting depopulation of children and “the reputational damage caused by misinformation that has stubbornly lingered in such sectors such as agriculture, forestry and fisheries.”

Official figures point to the dismal recovery of fishery businesses in Fukushima. When contacted by The Japan Times, the prefecture put a preliminary estimate of the fish catch amount in 2018 at 4,010 tons, which, according to the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, is a sixth of the pre-disaster level of about 25,000 tons in 2010.

According to a Jiji Press poll conducted in February on 2,000 people aged 18 or over nationwide, 2.2 percent said they see much progress in the reconstruction of disaster-hit areas, and 42.8 percent believe progress has been made to a certain extent.

On the other hand, 3.8 percent saw no progress at all and 43.8 percent claimed that they do not see much progress.

The survey showed that 74.8 percent see little or no progress in the reconstruction of areas damaged by the nuclear meltdown in Fukushima.

“It is important that we all continue to unite our hearts to be with the afflicted for many years to come, to ensure that none of those who are in difficult situations will be left behind, and that each and every one of them will be able to regain peace in their daily lives as soon as possible,” Prince Akishino said.

Episode 9 podcast (Japan Times)



March 11, 20

Episode 9: Eight years on from Fukushima

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/podcast/episode-9-eight-years-fukushima/#.XIZOF7jjLyQ>

| KYODO

On the eighth anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake, staff writer Ryusei Takahashi shares his experience of a recent visit to the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant and Magda Osumi discusses the Tohoku region's recovery. Hosted by Oscar Boyd.

<https://audioboom.com/posts/7198038-eight-years-on-from-fukushima>

I have the RIGHT to speak out!



March 10, 2019

Fukushima child evacuee speaks out

<https://beyondnuclearinternational.org/2019/03/10/fukushima-child-evacuee-speaks-out/>

After “so much pain and sorrow”, a call to end nuclear power

By “Yumi”*

Dear citizens and friends,

My name is Yumi, I'm a high school student now living in Kyoto, Japan.

First, look at this photo of my scribbled note on a sheet of paper.

こんなくさしい思い
をしている。そして、体験
をしているから、私は脱原発
反原発、がしきうけいれ反対とい
けんりはあると思います。
前・福島からひなんした子ども

It reads, "I have been through so much pain and sorrow. So I have the RIGHT to speak out: 'Zero nuclear power! No nukes! No bringing in radioactive contaminated waste!' I am a child evacuee from the Fukushima nuclear disaster."

I wrote it when I was an elementary school student soon after my mother and I were evacuated together from Fukushima to Kyoto.

In nearby communities my mother was crying out against nuclear power and telling the public how she had struggled to evacuate from the nuclear disaster.

At that time, being an elementary school student, I had no choice but to accompany her and listen to her speeches.

As a kid, her stories of the nuclear power accident were too difficult to understand, and to be honest, all a bit boring.

I remember a drawing pad and writing utensils I always used to take with me to pass the time drawing pictures.

In gatherings and meetings, my mother shed tears expressing her “No to nuclear power” pleas to the public.

Suddenly one day, a vision of my grandfather, cousins and the old classmates I had been parted from, and now far away, appeared in my mind’s eye.

I felt hatred for nuclear power and the disaster which caused this tragedy rise up in me.

This was how and why even as a kid I felt compelled to write down those sentences.

Eight years have passed since then, all the feelings I had back then are fading as the years roll by, but whenever I look at this piece of paper I remember those feelings as clearly as if it was just yesterday.

In Fukushima City where my family lived, due to the Fukushima nuclear power plant disaster, they detected 600 times higher doses of radiation than before the accident.

However, the government of Japan did not issue any evacuation order for the residents.

So far I haven’t had any serious health issues, but a great fear strikes me whenever I hear the child thyroid cancer incidences in Fukushima prefecture have increased, and especially every time I myself undergo a yearly thyroid medical examination.

One reason for this is the memory of the unstoppable nose bleeds I suffered in the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

I have heard that the health effects of radiation can occur not only right after the irradiation, but also after many years, and there are not a few cases of this.

(The video below, featuring Arnie Gundersen of Fairewinds Energy Education, explains in 2016 the already observable the implications of increased thyroid cancers and other health effects.)

Along with my mother, I have become a member of plaintiffs of “the Kansai class action lawsuit for damages caused by the nuclear accident.”

The aim is to fight against the government of Japan and TEPCO, to create a safer society, which of course includes my family and friends in Fukushima, and to prevent another tragic nuclear accident from ever happening again.

Till now I was just following my mother’s footsteps.

However, from now on, as one of the victims of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, I am determined to do what I can do on my own, step by step, just as my mother has done and continues to do.

We the nuclear evacuees of Fukushima thank you for your much-needed continuing support.

Thank you.

Yumi

Yumi’s letter in Japanese

「こんな苦しい思いをしている。そして、体験をしているから、私は、脱原発、反原発、がれき受け入れ反対という権利はあると思います。～福島から避難した子ども～」

これは私と母が福島から京都に避難をしてすぐ、当時、小学生の私が書いたものです。

福島から京都へ避難をすると、私の母は様々な場所で避難の苦勞とともに「原発いらぬ」の声をあげていました。

小学生の私はいつも母とともに会場へ出向き、母の話を聞くことになりました。

小学生の私にとって、原発事故の話は難しく、正直、退屈以外の何者でもありませんでした。

そのため、いつも画用紙と筆記用具を持参し、絵を書いて時間をやり過ごしていたものでした。それでも、毎回、涙を流しながら「原発いらない」と話す母の姿を見てみると、突然、離れ離れになってしまった祖父やいとこ、そして、クラスメイトのことを思い出し、そのきっかけを作った「原発」や「原発事故」に対して、憎しみの感情を抱くようになり、書いた言葉がこれでした。あれから8年が経ち、当時の感情は月日とともに薄くなっていましたが、この画用紙を見ると、当時の気持ちが昨日のことにように思い出されます。私たちが住んでいた福島県福島市は、福島の原発事故により、それまでの600倍となる放射線量が計測されました。しかし、日本政府から避難指示は出されませんでした。

私は今のところ、大きな健康被害は出ていませんが、福島の子どもたちの小児甲状腺がんが増えるたび、また、毎年の甲状腺の検査のたび、大きな恐怖を感じます。

なぜなら、私は福島の原発事故後、どぼどぼと止まらない鼻血を出したからです。

放射能の被害は、すぐに出ることもあれば、何年も経ってから現れることも少なくないと聞きました。

自分たちはもとより、福島の家族や友達みんなが安心して暮らせる社会づくり、二度と悲しい原発事故が起こらないよう、私と母は原発賠償関西訴訟の原告になり、日本政府と東電と闘っています。

これまでは、ただ母についていっただけでしたが、これからは私も母と同様に、福島の原発事故の一被災者として自分にできることを少しづつやっていきたいと思っています。

みなさんの応援もよろしくお願いいたします。

**For fear of reprisals, neither Yumi nor her mother can use their names or be featured here photographically. We thank her — and Etsuji Watanabe, a member of the Japanese anti-radiation citizen-scientist group ACSIR — for permission to publish her letter.*

Headline photo shows an anti-nuclear protest in Japan in 2011. (Photo: 保守/WikiCommons)

How far should medical responsibility go?

March 18, 2019

Lawsuit over 3/11 triage decision shakes medical groups

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201903180047.html>

By SUSUMU YOSHIDA/ Staff Writer

SENDAI--A lawsuit over an elderly woman's death in the chaos following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake has prompted medical professionals to seek legislation absolving them of responsibility for judgment errors made during triage.

Family members of the 95-year-old woman from Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, said she died after the Japanese Red Cross Ishinomaki Hospital gave her the lowest priority for treatment after the disaster struck on March 11, 2011.

In the lawsuit filed in October 2018 at the Sendai District Court, the family is demanding about 32 million yen (\$286,720) for compensation, saying the hospital is responsible for her death.

Opening arguments in the lawsuit were heard in January.

Medical associations and legal experts say that a ruling against the hospital would not only be unfair, but it could also affect the way emergency medical staff try to save people's lives after disasters.

"It is difficult to make the absolutely right decision in an extremely short time when diagnostic tools are unavailable," said Yuichi Koido, secretariat of the Japan Disaster Medical Assistance Team (DMAT), an organization commissioned by the health ministry. "It will be impossible to conduct triage under such circumstance if personnel are held responsible for a mistake."

Koido also heads the Japanese Association for Disaster Medicine (JADM), which decided at a board meeting on March 17 to make recommendations for legislation to protect triage staff from litigation. According to the lawsuit, the elderly woman was among hundreds of people taken to the hospital on March 14 after the magnitude-9.0 earthquake and tsunami struck the Tohoku region.

During triage in disasters or mass casualty situations, victims are given color tags depending on the urgency of their need for medical treatment.

Black tags are used for people who have already died or those with such severe injuries that they cannot survive even with the care available.

Patients given red tags have a chance of survival but only with immediate treatment. They are given the top priority.

Yellow tags are reserved for patients who are not in immediate danger of death but require observation and hospital care.

Green tags represent the lowest priority level, and they are for people deemed not in need of medical care by a specialist.

Medical personnel are expected to make such triage decisions in less than 30 seconds per patient.

The elderly woman received a green tag at the front entrance of the hospital building. She died three days later after developing dehydration-related symptoms at the hospital while waiting to be transported to a shelter.

Her family claims the woman should have been given at least yellow status because she had been certified by the municipal government as being in need of level-five nursing care. The plaintiffs noted that her doctor at the Ishinomaki hospital had provided an opinion for the certification.

Level-five means the person is unable to walk or communicate properly. The family said the woman also could not eat on her own.

According to the lawsuit, the hospital is responsible for her death because she was left unattended and unable to eat or drink.

The hospital has rejected the family's arguments.

"We believe that either a doctor or a nurse conducted the triage following proper procedures," a representative of the hospital said. "Primarily, those who are dismissed in triage as not in need of medical treatment are supposed to either go home or move to a shelter."

The representative also noted that the hospital at that time was overwhelmed by up to 600 disaster victims.

"We were in short supply of necessary resources. We gave her an IV. That's the best we could do," the representative said.

Koju Nagai, a lawyer who used to head the disaster assistance team of the Japan Federation of Bar Associations (Nichibenren), has long pointed out potential legal problems involving disaster triage. "Medical personnel are under duty of care in normal circumstances, and there is no clause to ease it even during times of disaster," Nagai said. "There is always a risk that they will be held accountable for an error, even if it's an unavoidable one."

If triage decisions by nurses or rescue personnel are considered "diagnostic actions," that could constitute a violation of the Medical Practitioners Law, according to Nagai.

"To prevent emergency medical care personnel from feeling daunted, there should be rules and regulations to clarify that they will not be held responsible for a mistake unless it's done intentionally or by gross negligence," Nagai said.

Toshihiro Suzuki, a lawyer who has long been involved in medical-related lawsuits and is a special adviser to the president of Meiji University, said: "First there needs to be a public relief system streamlined for cases that inflict a sacrifice by a patient. Then, there should be a law to clearly exempt doctors and hospitals from liability."

Fukushima school will close again

March 22, 2019

5 kids graduate from Fukushima school reopened after disaster

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201903220060.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

KAWAMATA, Fukushima Prefecture--Five sixth-graders bid their elementary school a fond farewell here on the morning of March 22, during the school's graduation ceremony, an event which won't be held next year.

Only a year has passed since the school reopened last spring after an evacuation order for the area issued over the 2011 triple meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in the prefecture was lifted. It's set to shut again at the end of March.

Yamakiya Elementary School will temporarily close its doors from then since no students will be attending classes there as there are no other students and no new students are expected to enter.

Its five graduates had commuted by school buses from their homes located outside the town, where they evacuated after the earthquake and tsunami triggered the nuclear disaster eight years ago.

About 60 people, including local residents, attended the ceremony, which began at 10 a.m.

"We have many memories, all of which are full of our friends' smiles," said graduating student Hinata Kanno, 12, during the address, mentioning events where all the sixth-graders performed a local traditional dance called "Sanbiki Shishimai" (dance of three fictional animals).

They were the children's first performances in eight years.

The school's principal, Jindo Saito, asked the children to continue to cherish their hometown, the Yamakiya district.

Fourteen elementary or junior high schools in Kawamata, Tomioka, Namie, Iitate and Katsurao in the prefecture reopened in April 2018 after the evacuation order was lifted.

At an elementary school in Iitate, which consists of what were three separate schools before the 2011 disaster, 14 sixth-graders graduated at a ceremony on March 22. The number of graduates there is the highest of all the 14 schools.

The sixth-graders recalled how they encouraged each other in the past six years and said they would never forget their experiences in the new school buildings.

From April, 13 schools in the five areas will enter their second year since reopening. Children at those schools are able to receive a sufficient degree of educational support. However, the schools have faced problems securing a satisfactory number of students.

(This article was written by Hiroki Koizumi and Hiroshi Fukatsu)

Fukushima rice rebounds as "industrial" rice

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As fears linger, Fukushima rice rebounds under anonymity

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201903200005.html>

By DAISUKE HIRABAYASHI/ Staff Writer

FUKUSHIMA--Shipments of Fukushima rice have rebounded since the 2011 nuclear disaster, but Masao Matsukawa, a rice farmer in the prefecture, is not happy about the situation.

Before the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, most of the rice grown at Matsukawa's farm in Sukagawa was sold for household use.

Now, the bulk of his annual harvest of 15 tons is designated for "industrial use," mainly by convenience store and restaurant chains, and simply labeled "domestic product."

"I am so sad about it all," Matsukawa, 74, said. "I am so confident in the rice I grow, so I wish to sell it openly under the 'Fukushima' label."

But rice from the northeastern prefecture is still struggling to reach pre-disaster levels for household use because of lingering consumer concerns about radiation.

The nuclear disaster took a heavy toll on the prices of Fukushima rice.

The "arm's length price" of the rice, for direct transactions between marketing groups and wholesalers, was 10.4 percent below the national average for the 2014 harvest.

However, the price was only 3.0 percent below the national average for the 2018 harvest, according to preliminary figures.

The comeback has been driven by solid demand for industrial use rice for products sold at convenience stores and dishes served at restaurants.

According to a farm ministry survey, industrial use accounted for 65 percent of shipments of rice produced in Fukushima Prefecture in the year through June 2017, one of the highest ratios in Japan. No comparable figures are available, though, for the pre-disaster period.

When the scope is limited to rice handled by the Fukushima Prefecture branch of the National Federation of Agricultural Cooperative Associations, industrial use accounts for more than 80 percent of the shipments, up about 15 percentage points from pre-disaster levels, officials said.

“There is high demand for industrial use rice from Fukushima Prefecture, which is cheap for its taste,” one distributor said.

Industrial use rice often only carries a “domestic” label with no mention of the production area.

But labels on rice for household use usually show the production area. And consumers are still pulling back from Fukushima labels.

Rice of the Tennotsubu strain, a brand from Fukushima Prefecture that debuted in autumn 2011, was put on the shelves at a rice store in Tokyo last year, only to be withdrawn because of next-to-nothing sales.

“Products of Fukushima Prefecture, where the nuclear disaster has had lingering consequences, are not the first to be chosen,” the shopkeeper said.

Since 2012, all bags of rice produced in Fukushima Prefecture have been subject to the prefectural government’s blanket testing. The screening has cost about 6 billion yen (\$54 million) annually.

Since August 2015, no rice has been found with radioactive substances exceeding the central government’s safety standards.

The prefectural government plans to switch to a sample testing, possibly with the 2020 harvest.

According to a Consumer Affairs Agency survey conducted in February, 12.5 percent of consumers are hesitant to buy products from Fukushima Prefecture because of possible radioactive content.

Although that percentage is the lowest since the survey started in 2013, it shows that aversion to Fukushima products remains.

In hopes of further reducing the ratio, the prefectural government in October began sending its workers to rice shops across Japan to advertise the taste and safety of Fukushima rice.

10th ruling in favour of plaintiffs

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20190326/p2g/00m/0dm/072000c>

Japanese court awards damages to Fukushima evacuees

March 26, 2019 (Mainichi Japan)

MATSUYAMA, Japan (Kyodo) -- A Japanese court on Tuesday ordered the government and Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc. to pay a combined 27 million yen (\$245,300) in damages to more than 20 people who fled from their hometowns due to the 2011 disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The Matsuyama District Court awarded payments to 23 of the 25 plaintiffs, who had sought a total of 137.5 million yen in damages. In the wake of the nuclear disaster, they evacuated from Fukushima Prefecture to Ehime Prefecture, where the court is located.

The ruling marked the 10th consecutive loss for TEPCO in a series of similar damages lawsuits. The state was ordered to pay damages for the sixth time.

The plaintiffs claimed the government and the power company had failed to take proper steps to prevent the nuclear plant from being destroyed even though they were capable of foreseeing a potential disaster by 2006 based on official assessments on major earthquake and tsunami dangers.

Supporting their claim, Presiding Judge Keiko Kuboi ruled the government and the utility could have predicted the tsunami based on the assessment, released in 2002, and the plant could have withstood the massive waves had it installed watertight doors and taken other steps against flooding.

The plaintiffs said the compensation they had received from the utility is not enough, given the nuclear crisis triggered by the massive earthquake and ensuing tsunami on March 11, 2011, has separated families and destroyed community ties.

They each demanded 5.5 million yen for their psychological suffering and financial losses, including costs for moving.

The ruling was the 10th among roughly 30 similar damages suits filed across Japan against the government and the utility.

In the trial of the latest case, the government said it could not have foreseen tsunami and did not bear a responsibility to instruct the utility to take preventive measures, while TEPCO claimed it had done what it could do and said it had already paid necessary damages to those affected by the disaster.

All nine previous rulings said TEPCO must pay damages to those affected. Five of them also held the government responsible.

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