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3F Kotobuki Bldg., 1-58-15, Higashi-nakano, Nakano-ku, Tokyo 164-0003, JAPAN

URL: <<http://www.jca.apc.org/cnic/>> e-mail: <cnic-jp@po.ijnet.or.jp>

CNIC MAKES ANTI-MOX APPEAL at HAGUE



From left: André Cornut, Hideyuki Ban, Shaun Burnie, Martin Hemingway, Hisham Zerriffi

Members of Citizens' Nuclear Information Center (CNIC) joined the Hague Appeal for Peace (HAP) held in the Netherlands from May 11 to May 15 where 8,000 people from around the world assembled, making the International Congress Center look like a miniature version of the world. Exactly 100 years ago, from May 18 to July 21, the first international peace conference was held with the cooperation of the then-Emperor of Russia Nicholas II and the Netherlands' then-Queen Wilhelmina. Though a second conference was held in 1907, none were subsequently convened until this year because of World War I.

This year's peace appeal was called for by NGOs from around the world. The four main themes of the conference were: 1) strengthen international humanitarian and human rights laws and institutions; 2) advance the preven-

tion, peaceful resolution, and transformation of violent conflict; 3) develop and link disarmament efforts, including nuclear abolition; 4) identify the root causes of war, and develop a culture of peace. Everyone from around the world who joined the conference agreed to call on NATO to stop the military attack on Kosovo.

CNIC joined hands with Japan Congress Against A- and H-Bombs (GENSUIKIN), and together sponsored an individual forum entitled "Campaign at the HAP. To Appeal Against

In this issue:

CNIC Makes Anti-MOX Appeal at Hague	1-3
Operation of Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant	4
Delayed Once Again	
Review of Long-term Nuclear Program Begins	5-6
Electric Utility Industry Law Amended	7
Anti-Nuke Who's Who: Ryoichi Hirano	8
News Watch	9-10

Plutonium Reprocessing and Utilization." We also held a booth exhibit, and emphasized the dangers of MOX,(Uranium-Plutonium Mixed-Oxide) fuel utilization. The booth was aimed mainly at participants of the Peace Appeal. As a result, we were able to obtain the cooperation and support of Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) of U.K., Institute for Energy and Environmental Research (IEER) of the U.S., Collectif National STOP MELOX et MOX of France, World Information Service on Energy (WISE) of the Netherlands, and Greenpeace International. Mr. Peer de Rijk and Mr. Joop Boer of WISE were very helpful, especially in preparations for the individual forum.

The chairman of the workshop was Shaun Burnie of Greenpeace International. A report on the situation in U.K. was presented by Martin Hemingway of NFLA, that of the U.S. was given by Hisham Zerriffi of IEER, the situation in France was described by Andre Cornut of Stop MELOX, and conditions in Japan were outlined by Hideyuki Ban of CNIC.

The four countries that presented reports on MOX have a lot in common. Japan, U.K., and France are deeply involved with one another with regard to nuclear fuel reprocessing and MOX fuel manufacturing. In May, the Japan Nuclear Cycle Development Institute (JNC, formerly PNC) signed an agreement with Rus-

sia on research cooperation for MOX fuel manufacturing using separated plutonium obtained from dismantled nuclear arms. This means that Japan will become involved in the use of weapons-grade plutonium. U.K. and France are already involved in Russian and American utilization of MOX fuel manufactured from weapons-grade plutonium. For example, COGEMA of France has a contract with U.S. for building a plant that makes MOX fuel from plutonium obtained from dismantled nuclear arms.

The participants of the workshop also included some members from the Netherlands' International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), young people from Russia's social ecology alliance group, and others from Thailand as well. The Congress ended following a joint appeal opposing the separation and utilization of plutonium. Because we had only 90 minutes for the entire workshop, we held a small friendship and exchange party in a hotel room afterwards. We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who helped us make this workshop a success. It was a very meaningful gathering where voices opposing the use of MOX fuel and those opposing the use of weapon-grade plutonium came together as one.

by Hideyuki Ban

Common Appeal Against Any Plutonium Extraction and Utilization

P R E A M B L E

The 20th century has been the nuclear era. Plutonium, discovered in the end of 1940, was not something that saved us. On the contrary, plutonium has caused huge suffering and will be a burden on future generations. The plutonium bomb, first exploded in Alamogordo, killed tens of thousands of people in a flash at Nagasaki. During the race to develop nuclear weapons in the post-war era, plutonium was produced in huge quantities. Now there is a huge surplus of plutonium from dismantled nuclear weapons. In the civil sector, plutonium was envisaged as a fuel for the fast breeder reactors (FBR), but the development of FBRs has failed everywhere due to technical and economic difficulties. In Great Britain development stopped in 1994. In France the decision to close the Superphenix was taken in 1997. In Japan, FBR Monju stopped after an accident in 1995. The Russian BN-600 reactor has suffered over thirty sodium leaks in the twenty years of its operation, including a serious 1994 fire. In Germany, the Kalkar fast-breeder reactor was scrapped and converted into a water-theme park.

Reprocessing factories, which produce plutonium, are located in Britain, France, India, Russia and Japan. The Japanese plant in Tokai has been out of operation since March 1997 following a fire explosion accident in the low-level radioactive disposal block. The construction schedule for Rokkasho reprocessing plant is postponed every year, due to the unexpected high construction cost. In Britain, the decision to close the Dounreay reprocessing plant by 2006 was taken in

June 1998 and both reprocessing lines at the Sellafield factory are plagued with technical problems.

Reprocessing factories operating in France and Britain rely on contracts with other countries. Among them, Japan and Germany are the biggest clients. Last year the German government signaled its intention to withdraw from this business. Belgium too is reviewing its need for continued reprocessing at the French Cap La Hague plant. Proposals to utilize plutonium dismantled from nuclear weapons in mixed oxide (MOX) fuel encourages the utilization of civil plutonium for this purpose. An international trade in MOX between spent nuclear fuel suppliers and MOX manufacturers risks nuclear weapon proliferation through the increasing easy supply of weapons usable materials. The Japanese nuclear industry is willing to collaborate in utilizing weapon-dismantled plutonium, but the technology to handle high purity plutonium will result in easy access to the knowledge of producing nuclear weapons. This risks an unwanted nuclear proliferation. Utilization of surplus Plutonium as MOX fuel in light-water reactors does not eliminate plutonium. Fresh fuel burnt with MOX creates more plutonium. MOX does not solve the surplus plutonium problem. Military and civil plutonium should be mixed with high level waste residues from reprocessing for storage pending solution of the long-term management strategy. No more civil plutonium should be extracted from spent nuclear fuel.

ACTION

We demand that the Japanese government:

- stops the utilization of MOX
- cancels the shipment of MOX from Europe scheduled for this autumn
- shutdown the Tokai reprocessing plant
- abandons construction of the Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant
- withdraws from fast-breeder reactor research and retires Monju

We demand that the British government:

- abandons the Sellafield MOX plant which awaits authorization to operate
- closes the demonstration MOX facility at Sellafield
- declares all plutonium 'a waste' and urgently conduct research on options for its eventual long-term storage containment
- imposes a moratorium on all plutonium / MOX international shipments pending a review of plutonium policy
- instructs BNFL to negotiate the conversion of foreign reprocessing contracts to spent fuel storage contracts in order to receive returned material.

We demand that the French Prime Minister:

- do stop the production of plutonium and in consequence of MOX, considers the danger of plutonium for the populations and environment
- remembers the agreement of the Socialist Party signed with the Greens to introduce a moratorium until 2006 on the reprocessing of disposals and the fabrication of MOX and, follows the agreement promised to the voters and that a real debate to be established on the basis of the halt of reprocessing.

We demand that the Russian government:

- redirects funds from development of new plutonium programs to address the devastating environmental and health consequences of past nuclear production.
- resists attempts to amend article 50, part 3 of the Russian law on protection of the environment which prohibits importation of radioactive waste and other nuclear materials for storage of disposal uphold the spirit of this law by ending import of foreign spent fuel for reprocessing;
- draw on Russia's existing expertise in vitrification technologies to initiate a large scale program for immobilization of surplus weapon plutonium.

We demand that the US government:

- uphold its decades-long non-proliferation policy of discouraging plutonium use in reactors and follow an immobilization-only strategy for plutonium disposition;
- not fund a disposition program in Russia that will develop the infrastructure for continued plutonium processing and use.

May 14, 1999 at Hague, the Netherlands

Operation of Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant Delayed Once Again

Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd. (JNFL) announced on April 26 that initial operation of the reprocessing plant currently being constructed in Rokkasho-mura, Aomori Prefecture is to be delayed once again. The previous plan called for operations to begin in January 2003. The new date is now set for July 2005. This is the sixth delay since the first schedule was announced by JNFL. It is also the second delay since construction of the plant commenced.

JNFL says the delay is due to a number of reasons: 1. An inability to estimate the time necessary to cover the loss caused by a change of construction plans made in 1996. 2. The need to spend time to conduct new safety inspections required following the fire and explosion accident at the Bituminization Facility of Tokai Reprocessing Plant operated at the time by the Power Reactor and Nuclear Fuel Development Corporation (PNC). 3. More time required in order to conduct the cold test as thoroughly as possible.

Currently, only 13% of the construction has been completed thus far. It is obvious that completion of the facility will be delayed. Despite this overall delay, construction of the spent fuel storage pool was completed, and spent fuel from Fukushima 1 nuclear plant was transported to the storage facility on October 2, 1998. As this spent fuel was being transported from Fukushima to Aomori, news reports revealed alteration and fabrication of inspection data on spent fuel transport casks. Although additional transportation of spent fuel to the storage pool in Rokkasho has been halted, we cannot ignore JNFL's clear intention of placing first priority on the construction of storage-related facilities. If the case of data-alteration had not been made public, spent fuel from nuclear power plants around the nation would have been transported to the facility, one after another.

JNFL's explanation for the delay in operation is nothing but an excuse. The major cause of delay is the surplus amount of plutonium that Japan holds, which has mounted to a dangerous level. The 10 electric utilities firms that have consigned reprocessing to COGEMA and BNFL in Europe have plans only on how to use, or get rid of, surplus plutonium. In other

words, these utility companies, together with the government, are trying to push through the MOX utilization plan in order to show that plutonium stockpiled in Europe is not "surplus" plutonium. At a time when the government's plan to make actual use of a fast breeder reactor (FBR) seems to have become more and more unrealistic, it is most likely that utility companies will end up facing great difficulties in carrying out a plan to use MOX fuel in light water reactors (LWRs).

No doubt Japan will also become a target of criticism for the international community in light of the vast amount of plutonium being stockpiled in Europe. By 2010, the amount of plutonium will have mounted to 45 tons!! In view of this situation, there is no need whatsoever for Japanese utilities to rush the date for starting operations of the Rokkasho reprocessing plant. Rather, if they are thinking seriously about how to prevent further stockpiling of plutonium, the utilities should decide to delay operations even further.

Along with the decision to delay operations, JNFL also reexamined total construction costs. Their calculations showed that costs will reach 2.14 trillion yen, 2.5 times the initial estimate of 840 billion yen. To cover this, the power utilities have decided to create an additional fund of 500 billion yen total. This is on top of the 100 billion yen for construction and 500 billion yen as an advance on reprocessing which has already been paid for. As a result of all this, the separated plutonium produced at Rokkasho Plant will be the world's most expensive plutonium.

It would seem that for the Japanese government and the electric utilities, the Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant is nothing but a huge burden with no benefits whatsoever. This is especially so when considering the growing surplus of plutonium and the huge and rising construction costs. However, they will never give up on the construction plan, because to them, the village of Rokkasho-mura is the best and only place they can consider as a "nuclear waste dump."

The current plan includes a total of 3 million drums of low-level waste and 3,000 tons of spent fuel to be sent from domestic reactors. It is expected that all of this waste and spent fuel will be sent to Rokkasho. In addition, there are all kinds of other radiation-contaminated wastes for which there is no specific or clear disposal policy. There is a plan under consideration, as well, to build a huge fuel storage facility in which spent fuel from all the nation's nuclear plants will be stored. All of these nuclear wastes are headed for Rokkasho-mura. Despite this reality, both the government and the utilities are unwilling to admit that they are only trying to find a place to "throw away wastes, not reprocess them."

by Masako Sawai

Review of Long-term Program on Nuclear Energy Begins

The Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) is about to undertake review of the nation's Long-term Program for Research, Development and Utilization of Nuclear Energy. Such reviews are conducted once every five years and the last one was conducted in June 1994.

On May 18 the AEC announced that the Long Term Program Council will be appointed for purposes of the review. Unlike the committees formed for the same purpose in the past, the new committee includes two members who hold views critical of nuclear development - a university professor specializing in the history of science and a lawyer. Although the decision to include members with critical views can be seen as a small measure of progress, the fact remains that they are only 2 members on a 32-member committee. This leaves plenty of room for doubt regarding whether or not discussions will be conducted on fair grounds.

As usual, the chairperson of a utility company was appointed as head of the committee. Most committee members are representatives appointed from utility companies, nuclear related agencies, industry organizations, or university professors supportive of the government's policy.

JAIF Conducts Preliminary Reevaluation

Prior to the first meeting of the Long Term Program Council, the Japan Atomic Industrial Forum, Inc. (JAIF) was asked by AEC to conduct during the period November 1998 to March 1999, a "preliminary reevaluation" of the Long-Term Program. A report was then submitted by JAIF to AEC. The content of the report was based on what the nuclear industries would like to see in the future. This kind of preliminary reevaluation is utterly unfair. The following are some of the points mentioned in the report that clearly show the aims of the nuclear industry. The "Foreword" of the report describes changes in Japan's nuclear conditions during the past five years:

- There are increased expectations that nuclear

power will play an important role in reaching national targets for greenhouse gases reduction.

- The development and utilization of nuclear power are advancing, as demonstrated, for example, in construction approvals for new reactors and in the progress made with plans to use MOX in LWR.

- Japan Nuclear Cycle Development Institute (JNC) was established to replace the Power Reactor and Nuclear Fuel Development Corporation (PNC) which lost public confidence as a consequence of a series of accidents.

- Instead of adopting a "catch-up" style in nuclear developments, Japan is now expected to become the front-runner and so an important contributor to world developments.

- More efforts should be given to international cooperation and strengthening of nuclear non-proliferation arrangements.

The reality, however, as we see it, is quite different. There have been many nuclear power-related incidents during the past five years. It was a period that included the unforgettable great Hanshin earthquake, a sodium leak and fire accident at Japan's fast breeder reactor (FBR) Monju, fire and an explosion at PNC's Tokai Bituminization Facility, and the revelation of several cases of information and data fabrication and alteration.

In Maki Town of Niigata Prefecture, Japan's first referendum on the construction of a nuclear power plant was held. Construction of the Rokkasho reprocessing plant has been delayed as costs have skyrocketed. The basic policy of reprocessing spent fuel has aborted and "interim storage" was officially acknowledged as the only solution. The development plan for constructing a FBR based on an existing Prototype has virtually terminated. As deregulation of the electricity market progresses and the increase in electricity demand slows down because of economic recession, the utility companies are being pressured to review their plans for future nuclear power construction.

These are the actual changes that have taken

place in Japan's nuclear power developments during the past five years. AEC's attempt to ignore this reality or to give the impression that Japan has become the "front runner" in nuclear developments rather than in fact being left behind world trends, will result in further loss of public confidence.

International Engagement?

The Report also states that "it is important to deal with the situation internationally, based on the idea of 'international engagement.'" The following points show what they mean by this:

1. Plutonium utilization

While pursuing "the possibility of an International Plutonium Management Concept," the report states that Japan will "continue to make appeals regarding the validity of the option of using plutonium according to each country's needs."

2. Spent fuel policy

There is a suggestive sentence in the Report that proclaims "the existence of an international move to search for various options (in solving the problem), without being restricted by time or geographical limits." What this really means is possible interim storage in Russia, a proposal that Professor Atsuyuki Suzuki and Assistant Professor Tatujiro Suzuki, both of Tokyo University have been advocating. Their argument is that if Japan offers Russia financial support in efforts to fabricate plutonium from dismantled nuclear weapons into MOX fuel, Japan will not only be able to contribute to nuclear non-proliferation but will also find a place to send its spent fuel.

<Bunn,M., Numark,N., Suzuki, T., "A Japanese-Russian Agreement to Establish a Nuclear Facility for MOX Fabrication and Spent Fuel Storage in the Russian Far East," Harvard University, Managing the Atom Project Working Paper, January 1999. Suzuki,A., "The End of the Cold War and the Emerging Nuclear Era: A Proposal of International Collaboration for More Healthy and Comfortable Nuclear Future," prepared for the CSIS Conference, December 4,1998>

Another plan to deal with spent fuel that has no where to go is to pursue "the possibility of using overseas reprocessing." All of Japan's spent fuel covered by the current reprocessing contract has been sent to reprocessing plants in U.K. and France. There is rumor now that the Japanese utility companies, COGEMA and

BNFL are trying to sign another contract to either reprocess or store more spent fuel from Japan.

Conditions for Nuclear Export

In regard to nuclear exports, the report states that Japan "should play an active role in spreading technology for the peaceful use of nuclear power." On March 1, the AEC asked for opinions regarding this point from nuclear industry representatives. According to media reports, a representative of a reactor manufacturer expressed the following view:

- The Japanese Government states that "export of nuclear plant equipment can be done only with proof of security" and requires that import countries have regulations for appropriate restrictions, an emergency system, and waste management. If an individual company is required to make these kinds of demands to the government of the import country, there will be no chance of winning the competition among companies of all nationalities. In reality, no country meets these kinds of strict security requirements; therefore, it is the same as saying "do not export."

- Due to the risk created by the unstable political systems of import countries, it is not easy to obtain low interest loans. Will the government seek the possibility of using another source of funds? For example, will the government use the ODA budget to cover the cost of conducting preliminary research on business opportunities?

- It will be necessary to sign a nuclear cooperation treaty with Asian countries beforehand, so that conditions will be ready for export.

These requests from nuclear-related companies to allow exports, even to countries that have no means of securing the safety of nuclear power, come from pure selfishness. However, once the promotion of nuclear export is included in the Long-term Program, it is possible that such requests will be accepted.

CNIC intends to keep a close watch on the direction of the review which started on June 2, and will make concrete alternative suggestions whenever necessary.

by Baku Nishio

Electric Utility Industry Law Amended

-- Environmental concerns neglected

An amendment to the Electric Utility Industry Law that permits partial deregulation of the nation's electric power industry was approved by the Upper House of the Diet on May 14. When implemented on March 21, 2000, the revised law will allow new companies to become involved in generating electricity; though they will be restricted to supplying only to certain consumers such as large department stores, schools, and hospitals.

Until now the 10 electric utilities have monopolized the production, transmission and sale of electricity in Japan. These large industrial services will be able to buy electricity from new electric generators beginning next spring. Although there are only about 8,000 of these consumers, the effect of deregulation will impact as much as 30% of Japan's total electricity demand. Once the market is reshaped by the new generating groups, the overall effect on the Japanese electric power industry will be tremendous.

Unfortunately, environmental concerns were not part of the arguments expressed by those who favor deregulation. The focus of discussion has been mainly on ways to stimulate the market and on methods of cost reduction. Almost all the new electrical generating companies could end up using fossil fuel to generate "dirty" electricity. This is extremely unfortunate considering the urgent world need to combat environmental problems.

In other countries efforts are being made to deal with environmental concerns such as global warming. The environmental measures include the promotion of investment in renewable energy and the creation of energy saving measures (i.e. a certain amount of marketed electricity must be renewable energy, all electricity from renewable energy sources must be purchased by electricity utilities, the CO₂ emission trade between generators, and so on). Measures of this sort are desperately required.

Some concerned members of the governmental committees did raise these points, but utilities and government officials dismissed such ideas as "obstructing the deregulation process". On the other hand, a special clause was included in the amendment to protect nuclear

power. The clause allows the existing utilities to issue a directive to the new electrical generating companies requiring them to reduce electricity generation when the nuclear plant capacity factor tends to drop. The clause was included so that "excessive deregulation will not obstruct the generation of nuclear power which helps prevent global warming."

The new rules will become important factors shaping the future direction of market developments. For the moment, the details of specific regulations are still being discussed. The Electric Utility Industry Council put out a report on July 7 after consulting the public for one month. According to the report the generators closest to the consumers will receive favorable treatment for load leveling. However, electricity rates system by contracted voltage will be revised in the future.

To avoid central interference, the existing ten utilities will not be required by law to lease transmission lines to newcomers. To prevent interference to newcomers from the utilities, it is vital for each existing utilities to keep information between the department of transmission, electricity generation, and sales separately within the company. The ten utilities are urged to use their own discretion on this matter. It seems unlikely that a fair competition will be achieved between newcomers and the utilities with huge market shares when the process relies on the utilities themselves. The newcomers have to rent transmission lines from existing utilities in order to distribute electricity. The government is still debating on rates for such lease, guidelines for conflict mediation, and guidelines for fair trade. These are all key issues that will shape the future of the deregulation.

The final regulations will be come up sometime before the end of this year after another public consultation and repeated examinations by a study group that will be formed within the subcommittee of the Electric Utility Industry Council. The group's study will be made public but the process will not be disclosed.

by Mika Ohbayashi

Anti-Nuke Who's Who

Ryoichi Hirano

A man fighting against the government's nuclear fuel cycle policy

by Kazuko Itoh

Born in Namioka-city, Aomori Prefecture in 1928, Ryoichi Hirano, a small grey-haired man with much dignity has been speaking firmly against the nation's nuclear fuel cycle policy for over 10 years.

He will hop on the train and go anywhere in Japan to talk about his views of nuclear fuel cycle policy, and share information about fuel cycle facilities now being constructed at Aomori's Rokkasho-mura. "Let me offer the point of view of an old man who lives in a remote area in Aomori where people are being forced to live with high level nuclear waste that has an overwhelmingly long half-life." So Hirano begins his speech while appealing to the audience for the need to spread arguments about waste management.

He calls on people to think about the fact that once we allow the government to find a place outside of the nuclear plant site to store spent fuel, which is one of the worst kinds of wastes, nuclear power plants will keep on operating. Therefore, in order to stop the operations of nuclear plants, there is a great need to strengthen a movement aimed at preventing nuclear waste storage, he says. And to start such a movement, not only people who live near the plant site who oppose nuclear power but also those who earn their living from the nuclear industry, as well as people living in city areas and everyone else who is simply concerned about the environment and against nuclear power, must be given accurate and up-to-date information about the nation's nuclear fuel cycle policy.

Hirano assures that once such movement is established, it will create a perfect opportunity to seek better solutions to the problems of nuclear power and so will be of benefit not only Japan but the rest of the world as well. "I am going to continue asking that all information be made public," he says.

Hirano takes on an important role as the



man of information. He always seeks to obtain as much information as possible regarding the nuclear fuel cycle issue and shares them it with people, hoping that information will be used in discussion and otherwise help to make more people aware of nuclear-related problems. The information he collects with his sharp insight is not limited to dangerous aspects, but also relates to political and economic considerations as well. He provides information in a way that makes it easy for people to understand what it all means.

He is also a man of action. Whenever a problem involving the Rokkasho nuclear fuel cycle facilities arises, he quickly protests to the local government and the industry. He is also representative of three anti-nuclear organizations: 10,000 plaintiffs to stop nuclear fuel cycle, a group to stop the nuclear fuel cycle in Namioka city, and the committee to prevent processes of nuclear waste disposal being carried at Rokkasho facilities. His presence is indispensable to Aomori's anti-nuclear movement and for Japan's movement as a whole.

He says that there is a need to create a movement that is rooted in people's everyday lives. "It will be wonderful if the movement is spread by people who exchange information and become interested and concerned about this issue in their daily conversations," he says.

Though Hirano keeps himself busy as an activist, he always finds time to go travelling with his wife at least once a year, which may be the reason why he is able to keep up despite his age.

NEWS WATCH

Another Trial Ruling Asks for a Social Choice

Following a court ruling on a suit demanding the suspension of Hokkaido Electric Power Company's Tomari 1 and 2 (see NIT No. 70), Sendai High Court on March 31 handed down a ruling regarding the claim that called for suspension of Tohoku Electric Power Company's Onagawa 1 and 2 (BWRs, 524 MW and 825 MW respectively).

Although the High Court rejected the plaintiffs' claim stating, "the court does not acknowledge the existence of any concrete risk of danger to health or life," it added that "this decision only applies to the present situation." The court further stated that there is a need for "a social decision and choice based on a firm view of the necessity of nuclear power and the current and future lifestyles of individual citizens, including consideration for the environment to be left for future generations." This kind of court decision, asking for a choice, is the third one since the court decision on the claim for the suspension of Shika 1 made in September 1998 (see NIT No. 68).

Fourth Shipment of VHLW from France to Japan

Vitrified high level waste (VHLW) from France was transported to the Japan Nuclear Fuel Limited storage facility on April 15. The VHLW was in 40 glass logs. Thus far, the number of glass logs brought into this facility has totaled 168. The total number of glass logs planned to be shipped from France and Britain is about 3,500. On April 17, the Summit meeting of the Association of Caribbean States adopted a statement protesting the transport of such radioactive wastes.

Japan Signs Agreement to Provide \$1 billion to KEDO

The Japanese government signed an agreement on May 3 with the Korea Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) on two light water reactors supply project with North Korea. According to the agreement, Japan will contribute \$1 billion of the total cost of \$4.6 billion. The Export-Import Bank of Japan will provide Japan's share of the contribution. The agreement between KEDO and the South Korean government, which will contribute \$3.2 billion, is expected to be concluded in May, at the earliest. Negotiations on the agreement with KEDO is proceeding on the basis that the Korean Electric Power Corporation (KEPCO) will undertake construction of the project.

JNFL to Stop Operation of Rokkasho Uranium Enrichment Plant System

Operation of a system linked to the centrifugal separators of the uranium enrichment plant in Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture will be suspended at any time before this coming summer, announced Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd. on April 23.

The plant has several systems, each of which are linked to a large number of centrifugal separators. Because of this, the plant boasts an annual production capacity of 1,050 tons at its separative work unit (SWU). Neither the number of centrifugal separators nor that of the linked systems have been disclosed, apparently for security reasons.

These centrifugal separators have thus far experienced many troubles. 3,633 units have been stopped until the end of March this year. Since suspending the operation of a single unit was not enough to relieve the situation this

time, the company was forced to suspend the whole system.

Toshiba, Hitachi and GE Tighten Cooperation

Toshiba, Hitachi and General Electric of U.S. jointly announced on April 12 their intention to establish an international joint venture for nuclear fuel before the end of this year, thereby integrating their operations related to design, production and sales of nuclear fuel.

The companies are also moving toward establishing another joint venture for design, production and sales of nuclear plants. An agreement to jointly accept orders for Fukushima 1-7 and 8 (ABWRs, 1380 MW each) has already been signed between Toshiba and Hitachi. The actual construction work for both plants is planned to begin in 2001.

No Trouble in Y2K?

The Agency of Natural Resources and Energy issued on April 26 an interim report on the Y2K problem of Japanese nuclear plants. The survey concluded that the companies have been conducting appropriate investigations and necessary modifications, and that the operation of reactors will continue normally. Despite this optimistic conclusion, however, other concerned groups still feel some doubt as to whether all reactors can actually be operated safely. Modifications are projected to be completed in November at the latest, but there is a

possibility that they will not all be completed in time. This weak sense of crisis is a matter for concern.

Citizens' Groups Protest HLW Geographical Disposal

Eight citizens' groups in Hokkaido, Gifu and Okayama prefectures issued a joint statement on March 29 opposing the government's geographical disposal plan. The three prefectures are being raised as the most likely place to become candidates for the geographical disposal of high-level radioactive waste. The statement was issued in response to the Agency of Natural Resources and Energy's preparation for setting up necessary regulations that would back up their plan of establishing in 2000 an organization which will be responsible for the disposal.

The statement criticized the autocratic promotion of the plan and the government's attitude which seems only concerned about meeting the schedule. It stated that no safety verifications on geographical disposal have been carried out, and warned that the plan will simply bequeath the threat of radioactivity to future generations. Furthermore, the groups demanded that the government revise its nuclear policy toward the abolition of nuclear plants, which are responsible for the production of the high-level radioactive wastes.

SUBSCRIPTION

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Citizens' Nuclear Information Center
3F Kotobuki Bldg., 1-58-15 Higashi-nakano, Nakano-ku, Tokyo 164-0003 JAPAN
Tel: 81-3-5330-9520; Fax: 81-3-5330-9530