

JAPAN'S POST-FUKUSHIMA ENERGY POLITICS

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Executive Summary

1. The 1973 and 1979 oil crises aside, the post-Fukushima (popularly known as post-311) period is arguably the most testing for Japan's energy industry. A massive earthquake almost destroyed the Fukushima nuclear reactor and created transitional energy shortages.
2. It also sparked off a debate on the future of nuclear energy and the possibility of renewable energy as a substitute and Japan's energy future in general. The non-profit organisation sector, non-governmental organisations and civil society were probably one of the most vocal components.
3. Fukushima provided a new galvanising point for anti-nuclear resistance groups. Three months before the Meiji Park anti-nuclear demonstration, on 11 June 2011, 79,000 members of civil society groups turned up for countrywide anti-nuclear protests that lasted till 12 June 2011.
4. Before the Great East Japan Earthquake, the Naoto Kan administration had cooperated with nuclear industry stakeholders; it was not until 311 that public unhappiness propelled him to examine renewable energy alternatives.
5. Post-Fukushima, then Prime Minister Naoto Kan rode on the wave of anti-nuclear sentiments to advocate his pro-renewable energy position as a substitute for nuclear power. However, his popularity sank to a new low when he introduced initiatives in this direction.
6. The anti-nuclear position slowly went on the decline from its peak in public opinion and after the ruling Democratic Party of Japan fell out of power. The anti-nuclear pair of Morihiro Hosokawa and Junichiro Koizumi briefly took over when campaigning for the Tokyo governorship.
7. When they lost the election, nationalistic Osaka mayor Toru Hashimoto who is associated with another right-leaning nationalist Shintaro Ishihara took a similar stance.

8. On the opposing side of the spectrum is current Prime Minister Abe who holds a pro-nuclear position like many others in his party and urges their reactivation after all safeguards have been satisfied.
9. Recent reports indicate that nuclear reactors would soon be turned on again when safety checks are satisfactorily completed.
10. Japan's nuclear power programme has come back one full circle since the late 1950s and 1960s when the country surveyed different energy sources for its economic development in spite of having access to affordable sources of Middle Eastern oil. The Fukushima nuclear plant is a product of this era.
11. High-profile environmental issues in the 1960s and 1970s also nudged Japan towards cleaner sources of fuel like nuclear and non-oil fossil fuels. Japan is now debating whether nuclear power is as friendly to the environment as it had thought decades ago.