Japan Utility Behind Nuke Crisis Faces Investors

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TOKYO (AP) — Shareholders angry at the utility company behind Japan's nuclear catastrophe peppered executives with questions Wednesday about leaking radioactive water and demanded a phase-out of atomic power.

In this June 12, 2013 file photo, workers in protective gear walk past thousands paper cranes at the emergency operation center of tsunami-crippled Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant, in Okuma in Fukushima prefecture. Shareholders are demanding that the utility whose power plant went into a nuclear meltdown following a huge tsunami two years ago abandon atomic energy. Motions demanding that TEPCO start supporting alternative energy and require executives to donate their pay to victims of the March 2011 nuclear disaster were defeated at an annual shareholders' meeting Wednesday. **(AP Photo/Noboru Hashimoto, File)**

Fifteen such motions from shareholders, including those demanding that Tokyo Electric Power Co. start supporting alternative energy and require executives to donate their pay to victims of the March 2011 nuclear disaster, were defeated at an annual shareholders' meeting.

Japan has struggled to rebuild communities and to clean up radiation from the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant, whose reactors melted down after its cooling systems were disabled by the tsunami.

"Please think of our suffering, our uncertainty, our fear of living with radiation," said Ryuko Tachibana, a stockholder from Namie, a town near the plant evacuated after the accident. "Material wealth does not lead to human happiness."

Other investors also got up during the nearly four hour meeting at a downtown Tokyo stadium to express outrage at the company's handling of the catastrophe and its aftermath.

The plant is still battling leaks, mounds of contaminated debris and power outage problems. The government estimates four decades will be needed for decommissioning. TEPCO is paying no dividends. The stock price has nose-dived, although it has recovered some of the initial plunge.

Greenpeace Japan activists, among the shareholders, were dressed up like casino workers before a fake gambling table set up at the stadium entrance.

"Nuclear power is a dangerous gamble," said Yuki Sekimoto, a Greenpeace spokeswoman.

TEPCO was bailed out by the government and nationalized. As its biggest shareholder, the government backs TEPCO and is studying the restart of idled reactors under new safety standards.

Although some in the crowd shouted at and heckled the executives, the stadium was also packed with investors allied with TEPCO. Security guards were everywhere, and one excited anti-nuclear shareholder got his microphone turned off and was told to sit down.

TEPCO officials repeatedly bowed and apologized for the "troubles and worries" the disaster had caused. But they acknowledged they did not know when the leaking radioactive water would end because water was crucial to keep melted fuel cool and it was a technological challenge to find exactly where the leaks were.

They also said the company would likely be dependent on government aid for a long time because of the challenges of decommissioning the reactors and decontaminating radiated land around the plant.

"We want to become a dynamic private sector company through reforms," TEPCO President Naomi Hirose told shareholders.

Some were not satisfied with the answers.

"You all shouldn't be sitting on a stage but should be at the unemployment office or wandering around some park," said one shareholder who identified himself by his surname Fujii.

Mariko Asada, who owns 100 shares, said she had to evacuate her Fukushima farm, where she had been growing her own food.

"TEPCO should just shut down," she told The Associated Press. "If we have another Fukushima, Japan will not survive."

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