

KEPCO inks accord with COGEMA on MOX supply

Normal business proceeds.

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Kansai Electric Power Co. reached an agreement Friday with COGEMA, France's state-owned nuclear fuel reprocessing company, to sign a contract possibly this summer for manufacturing mixed oxide-uranium fuel.

The decision by Kepco came one week after Fukui Prefecture, where Kepco hopes to use the fuel in its Takahama nuclear plant, granted permission for the company to use MOX fuel.

Kepco's MOX fuel program had been frozen since 1999, when data related to MOX fuel made by British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. was found to have been falsified after the fuel had arrived in Takahama.

That fuel was returned to England in 2002.

The government has demanded that manufacturers of MOX fuel bolster the management of production data before it would allow any utility to sign a MOX contract.

Antinuclear activists warned that getting information about contract details related to the fuel was likely to be difficult.

"COGEMA is an extremely secretive company. This may be because it is central to the French nuclear weapons program," said Kyoto-based antinuclear activist Aileen Mioko Smith, who played a key role in exposing the BNFL data falsification.

"Kepco is on public record stating it will release information about the quality of its fuel if COGEMA is willing. We doubt COGEMA can meet these Japanese demands for transparency," she said.

After finalizing the contract in the summer, Kepco hopes to begin burning MOX in its Fukui reactors from 2007.

Reactor restart OK

NIIGATA (Kyodo) Niigata Gov. Ikuo Hirayama indicated Friday that Tokyo Electric Power Co. may get its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power station in the prefecture back to full operation next month.

The utility was forced to shut down all of its reactors, including the seven at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant, in April after its widespread practice of keeping nuclear reactor accidents secret came to light.