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We, the electric utility companies, are expected to help "from the side" only, but as the development of sound nuclear power in Asia is important in the light of global environmental protection and energy supply security, we are willing to grant the necessary help.

We have already concluded an agreement for technical assistance in the peaceful utilization of nuclear power with Mainland China, and we have started the exchange of engineers for the training and transfer of operational experience and expertise. Furthermore, the Japanese government has started some aid programs to welcome the Asian electrical engineers to training programs in Japan.

I n t e r v i e w

Kazuhisa Mori of JAPANESE ATOMIC INDUSTRIAL FORUM



Interview with Mr. Kazuhisa Mori
Secretary General
Japanese Atomic Industrial Forum
June 13, 1996

NMR: The journal Nihon Keizai Shinbun reported on June 7 that the Japanese Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) will review the established fuel recycling policy in view of the public outcry over the Monju accident. How likely do you think it is that such a review will change official policy in regard to fuel recycling, plutonium use, and the development of fast breeder reactors?

Mr. Mori: It's difficult to answer your question in a definitive manner at this stage. It is true that the anti-nuclear groups gathered strength in their opposition to plutonium recycling, and that they started to say that Monju, and further FBR development programs, should be stopped. Recently I participated in a televised debate with the opposition group leader, Mr. Takagi, in which I expressed my views as follows:

Firstly, the earlier development projects of the experimental FBR JOYO, and the prototype Advanced Thermal Reactor FUGEN, progressed successfully without significant incident. I suspect there was a certain inertia and overconfidence within the manufacturing group and the operator, the Power Reactor and Nuclear Fuel Development Co. (PNC), which led to the Monju accident. When PNC tried to minimize and cover up the facts, this behavior damaged its image and undercut public trust. PNC's attitude should be reviewed and rectified, along with the safety checking systems and structures at Monju.

Secondly, endeavors should be made to regain the credibility and trust in nuclear safety among the public in order not to hurt the ongoing successful LWR program.

The third point I made was that there is a world-wide outcry for the recycling of resources in all industrial fields. Why not in the case of uranium? People tend to refer to the proliferation risks attached to plutonium recycling. But Japan is the only nation that has suffered from atomic bomb detonations. Therefore, I believe Japan is the most qualified nation to develop plutonium

recycling systems and technologies, being the most sensitive to the threat that proliferation would represent.

NMR:

Rumors are circulating according to which the final construction costs of the Rokkasho-Mura recycling plant might reach \$20 billion. Such costs could make plutonium recycling much more costly than the once-through cycle, comprising interim storage of spent fuel and final disposal of these fuel elements at a later stage. How can you justify such heavy capital investments?

Mr. Mori:

I believe that plutonium recycling is a strategic security measure against the potential shortfall of uranium resources, and in the long run it should pay.

The presently planned capacity of the reprocessing facility at Rokkasho-mura will not be enough to cover the increasing output of spent fuel in the 21st century. Therefore, we have to increase the storage capacity anyway. Also, in order not to invite unnecessary apprehensions of other nations, we are determined not to produce and store plutonium in excess of our real needs.

NMR:

Japanese utilities have reprocessing contracts with Cogema and BNFL, and some quantity of vitrified HLW has already been returned to Japan and is stored in Rokkasho-mura on an interim basis. In addition to the retransfer of HLW from France and the United Kingdom to Japan, HLW quantities will also arise from the future domestic reprocessing activities. What are the prospects for finding sites for the permanent disposal of these HLW quantities?

Mr. Mori:

The steering Committee for the High Level Radioactive Waste Project (SHP) has studied the various aspects of HLW disposal, in cooperation with PNC and Japan Atomic Energy Research Institute (JAERI). SHP recently completed an interim report which includes the guidelines for the real work of locating the site and the results of an analysis with regard to public concern and interests.

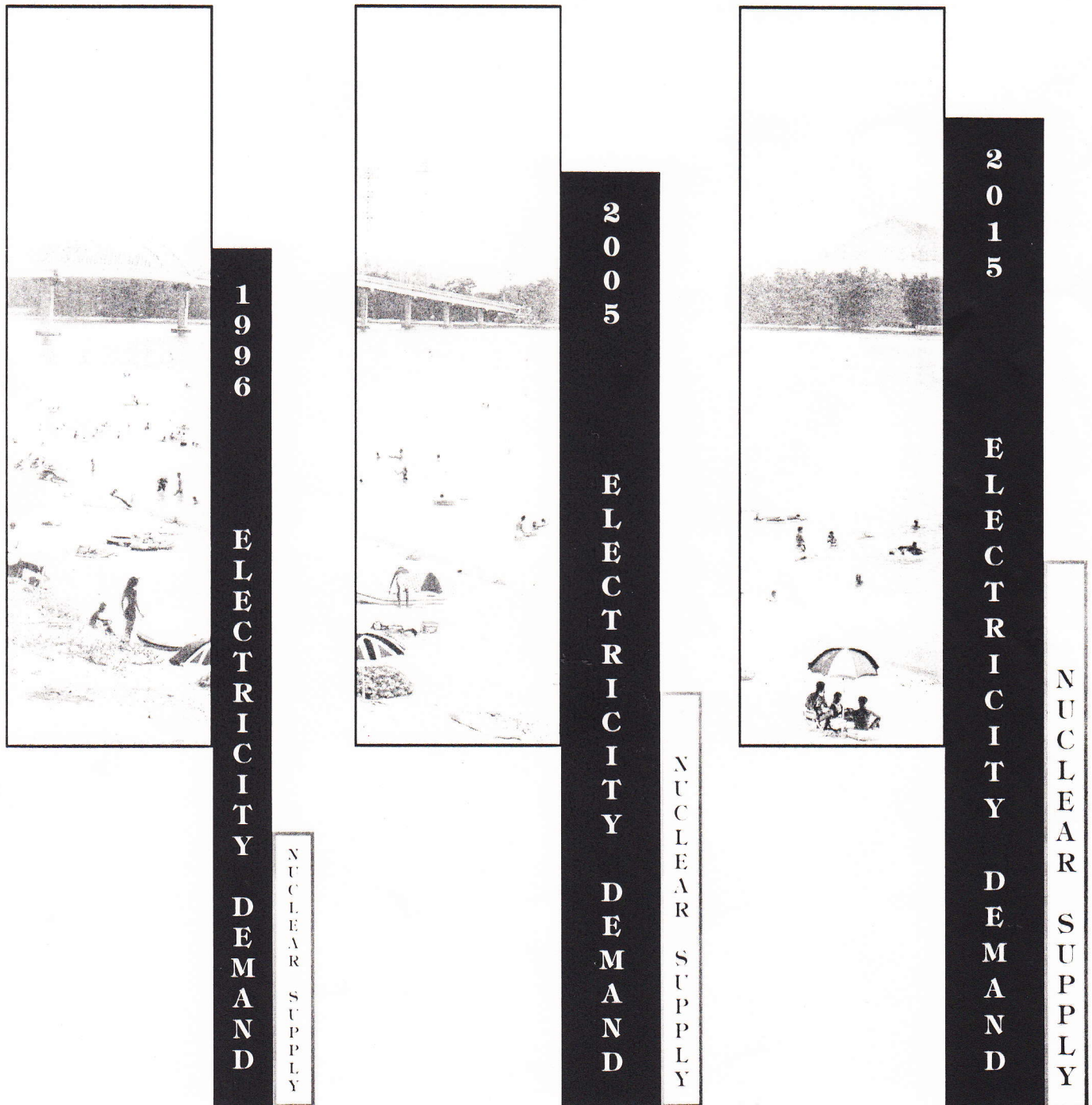
So far, extensive analytical research work, with some experiments, and information exchanges with overseas institutes and laboratories, have been actively pursued. We are currently proceeding on the assumption that the company to be in charge of final HLW disposal will be set up by the year 2000.

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