

Government to consider nuclear-free option

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By KEN SAKAKIBARA/ Staff Writer

In the face of strident anti-nuclear public sentiment, the government will consider abandoning nuclear power generation, sources said, a turnaround from its previous stance of continued reliance.

In response to the Fukushima nuclear disaster last year, the government proposed three options for the ratio of nuclear energy in power generation in 2030—zero percent, 15 percent and 20-25 percent—as a basis for a new energy policy.

To facilitate a "national debate" on the options, the government conducted deliberative polling, held public hearings and sought public opinion through the Internet and other means from July to August.

Now, a government panel tasked with analyzing the results of that debate is set to conclude that many citizens favor a nuclear-free society, the sources said. The government had previously expected to choose the 15-percent option.

The panel, set up earlier in August, is headed by national policy minister Motohisa Furukawa and comprises eight private-sector experts in opinion polling and other areas.

The strong support for the nuclear-free option has made it difficult for the government to stick to its preferred 15-percent option.

"We cannot win the upcoming election unless we put up a zero-percent policy," a Lower House member of the ruling Democratic Party of Japan said.

Opponents to the zero-percent option are expected to express concerns about adverse impacts on households and businesses, such as higher electricity bills.

Critics are also expected to argue that giving up on nuclear energy will conflict with the government's traditional nuclear fuel recycling policy.

If it does move forward with the zero-percent option, the government will likely set preconditions for the shift, and might not specify a target year for achieving a nuclear-free society, the sources said.

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