

Japan promotes its nuclear industry at special ASEAN summit

Joseph Santolan
9 April 2011

Japan's foreign minister, Takeaki Matsumoto, will co-chair a special ASEAN-Japan Ministerial Meeting in Jakarta today. The summit has ostensibly been called to discuss Southeast Asian aid to Japan in the aftermath of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami. There is, however, a hidden agenda to the meeting. Japanese Foreign Minister Takeaki Matsumoto will be representing the interests of the International Nuclear Energy Development of Japan Company (JINED), reassuring potential Southeast Asian clients of the safety of the nuclear power plants which JINED is marketing throughout the region.

JINED was formed in October 2010 to aggressively sell Japanese nuclear technology internationally. In December 2009, South Korea won a \$US40 billion contract to construct four nuclear reactors in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, beating out rivals from France, the US and Japan. One of the key factors in the success of the Korean bid was the active role played by the Korean government. According to the *Asahi Shimbun*, South Korean President Lee Myung-bak phoned Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheik Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan six times to negotiate the deal.

In response to losing its bid to a better organized Korean conglomerates, the Japanese nuclear industry formed JINED, a government-private consortium that includes nine electric utilities, three nuclear plant manufacturers, and the Japanese government. JINED coordinates the interests of rivals Toshiba, Hitachi and Mitsubishi to sell nuclear plants internationally.

In November 2010, almost immediately after the formation of JINED, Japan signed a deal with Vietnam to construct a nuclear power plant on the Vietnamese

central coast. The plant, Ninh Thuan 2, is being built in conjunction with another nuclear plant at the same site, which is being constructed by a Russian nuclear consortium. Vietnam's purchase of the Japanese constructed nuclear plant will be funded with loans from the Japanese government.

On March 3, Japan signed an agreement with Indonesia to conduct feasibility studies for the construction of two nuclear plants on the islands of Bangka Belitung on the east coast of Sumatra. Japan is also negotiating proposals with Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Turkey.

In September 2010, Shusuke Kondo, chair of the Japan Atomic Energy Commission, presented reasons for the formation of JINED. He stated that the strength of the Japanese nuclear industry, which would facilitate its marketing abroad, was that it satisfied "stringent quality requirements and safety requirements that reflect severe natural environments such as frequent visits of typhoon, tsunami and earthquakes."

The ongoing crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi power station has exploded this claim. Even as workers struggle to stabilise three reactors at the plant, the Japanese government is engaged in damage control, attempting to preserve JINED's contract with Vietnam and continue negotiations with other potential regional buyers.

Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan has publicly spoken of his anger at the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) for the problems at Fukushima. This is empty posturing on the part of the government, which has had long history of covering up the safety

infractions and disasters of TEPCO, and is considering covering the estimated \$US12.3 billion liability of TEPCO for the current catastrophe.

Takeaki Matsumoto's meeting in Jakarta today with ASEAN leaders is the continuation in the international arena of this defense of TEPCO, the largest nuclear power company in Asia.

TEPCO holds a 20 percent share in JINED, making it the largest single stakeholder in the consortium. JINED president Ichiro Takekuro is executive vice president of TEPCO and has been working with TEPCO since 1969.

The proposals to build nuclear power plants within the Pacific earthquake "ring of fire" in the islands of Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines and on the typhoon-prone coast of Vietnam show a flagrant disregard for the safety issues raised by the disaster at Fukushima Daiichi. Far from pausing and drawing the necessary lessons, the Japanese nuclear power industry is intent above all on preserving its international competitiveness and profits.

The Ninh Thuan 2 power plant which JINED is to construct in Vietnam, will be at water's edge on the central coast of Vietnam, covering a land area of 514 hectares and a sea area of 308 hectares.

In a presentation given last November 24, Le Dai Dien of the Institute of Nuclear Science and Technology in Hanoi, assessed the risks of the site chosen for the construction of the two nuclear power plants. He surveyed historical evidence of typhoons, flooding and tsunamis. On average nine to ten typhoons whip the central coast of Vietnam every year, with flooding from the nearby Cai Phan Rang River reaching 2.4 meters high.

Significantly, the site has experienced tsunamis in the past, one of which reached a height of up to 18 meters. Le Dai Dien reported that the risk of tsunami is "not so high," but that "the damage due to tsunami, once it happens, may be very large." Yet the planned nuclear plant is proceeding.

The proposed site in Indonesia, on the Bangka

Belitung islands off the west coast of Sumatra, is just as problematic. The area has been reported by the Indonesian government as being at risk of earthquake or tsunami. While the island of Sumatra does block potential tsunamis threatening the proposed site, Bangka Belitung is not a low risk for earthquakes. The Global Seismic Hazard Assessment program of the International Lithosphere Program reported that Bangka Belitung had a moderate risk for earthquakes. This is the same level of risk that it assessed for the region of Fukushima.

In the Philippines, proposals are being discussed in congress to rehabilitate the long-mothballed Bataan Nuclear Power Plant (BNPP). JINED is one of the bidders for this proposal. The Bataan Nuclear Power Plant was constructed by Westinghouse in the late 1970s in a highly earthquake-prone region of the Philippines in close proximity to Mount Pinatubo. The Marcos administration paid \$US2.3 billion for the plant, in a scheme that involved massive bribery and overpricing on the part of Westinghouse. When completed in 1984 the plant had over 4,000 defects, so many that it was deemed inoperable. It has never been used. Proponents of rehabilitation advocate spending \$1 billion to resurrect this three-decade old plant. The disregard for safety in the pursuit of profit could not be more blatant.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact