Japan to renege on carbon emissions cuts

- 16:58 07 June 2012 by Michael Marshall
- For similar stories, visit the **Energy and Fuels** and **Climate Change** Topic Guides Timing is everything in politics, but evidently nobody told <u>Katsuya Okada</u>. Japan's deputy prime minister picked an unfortunate time to scale back on planned emissions cuts, given that carbon dioxide levels over parts of Japan just hit an all-time high (see "<u>Carbon dioxide levels</u> reach a new milestone").

In 2009, then prime minister Yukio Hatoyama promised that Japan would <u>cut emissions by 25 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020</u>. But on 30 May, <u>Okada told journalists that those plans may have to be scrapped</u>. The government is now considering setting a new target.

The problem is the shutdown of Japan's nuclear reactors. Following the <u>earthquake and tsunami in March 2011</u>, and the ensuing <u>crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant</u>, they have been powered down for safety tests. <u>Japan's last operational reactor went offline on 5 May</u>, and proposals to restart reactors have <u>triggered public protests</u>.

As a result, Japan has had to fall back on fossil fuels. According to the <u>US Energy Information Administration</u>, <u>Japan used 40 per cent more coal</u>, oil and gas in the first four months of 2012 than in the same period in 2011. <u>A rise in the country's greenhouse gas emissions was inevitable</u>.

The environment ministry's Central Environment Council says that without nuclear power, emissions will only drop by between 2 and 11 per cent on 1990 levels by 2020. If nuclear power plants were switched back on, however, Japan could cut emissions by up to 27 per cent by 2030.

Japan could become second biggest solar power nation

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WITH nuclear power on the ropes in Japan, it could be solar power's time to shine. Minamisoma City in Fukushima prefecture has signed an agreement with Toshiba to build the country's biggest solar park. The deal comes weeks after Japan introduced feed-in tariffs to subsidise renewable energy - a move that could see the nation become one of the world's largest markets for solar power.

Parts of Minamisoma are around 10 kilometres from the <u>Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant</u>, and land there has been contaminated by radiation fallout. "Moving away from a dependency on nuclear is of course involved [with the agreement to build the solar park]," a city official said.

Both Minamisoma and neighbouring Namie have called for the cancellation of plans to build a nearby nuclear power plant - although Minamisoma has received \$6.4 million over the past 25

years for initially agreeing to host the facility.

A number of Japanese municipalities have started solar projects in recent months. Plans have been drawn up for large-scale solar parks in Hokkaido and Kyushu, while <u>SB Energy began operating two megasolar facilities</u>, in Kyoto and Gunma, on 1 July.

"New solar projects are being generated day by day," says Toshiba's Yuji Shimada.

Solar, wind, biomass and geothermal energy still account for just 1 per cent of Japan's power capacity, however, so Japan has introduced a tariff to encourage investment. Utilities will pay solar energy firms around \$0.5 per kilowatt-hour - triple the standard industrial electricity price. The extra money will come through a rise in electricity prices.

Some estimates suggest the move could help Japan leapfrog Italy and <u>become the second-biggest market for solar power</u> after Germany - although business groups <u>fear that Japan's economic recovery will slow as a result</u> of the electricity price rise.

Meanwhile, Japan's nuclear power industry will continue to provide competition. A reactor at the Oi nuclear facility in Fukui prefecture was brought back online as the tariffs were introduced.

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Japan 'must restart' two nuclear reactors, Noda warns

Mr Noda is trying to convince the public that nuclear power is vital Continue reading the main story

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Japan must restart two nuclear reactors to protect the country's economy and livelihoods, Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda has said in a televised broadcast.

Measures to ensure the safety of two reactors at western Japan's Ohi nuclear plant have been undertaken, he said.

Since last year's Fukushima nuclear disaster, Japan's 50 reactors have been shut down for routine maintenance.

The crisis fuelled immense public opposition to nuclear power, but Japan is facing a summer of power shortages.

Japan's last nuclear shut down for routine maintenance was in May. When the third reactor at the Tomari plant in Hokkaido prefecture was switched off, Japan was left without energy from

atomic power for the first time in more than 40 years.

Public confidence in nuclear safety was shaken by the meltdowns at the Fukushima power plant, triggered by last year's devastating earthquake and tsunami.

Analysis

Roland Buerk BBC News, Tokyo

In making the television address, Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda has very publicly taken responsibility for restarting the nuclear reactors.

Indeed, it was a condition set by the governor of Fukui, which hosts the Ohi plant, before he gives his blessing.

The government had hoped to build more of a national consensus. Ministers have spent weeks wooing local leaders.

But nuclear power is a hugely controversial issue in Japan. Mr Noda warned Japanese society cannot survive without cheap and stable power.

He could now make a formal decision to restart the two reactors at Ohi. They are the first to have gone through new stress tests to check their resistance to natural disasters.

But any decision by Mr Noda could unleash strong criticism.

Opinion polls show many Japanese would rather try to get through the summer by cutting back on their electricity consumption.

"Cheap and stable electricity is vital. If all the reactors that previously provided 30% of Japan's electricity supply are halted, or kept idle, Japanese society cannot survive," Mr Noda said.

He added that some companies could possibly move production out of Japan, losing vital jobs as a result.

"It is my decision that Ohi reactors No 3 and No 4 should be restarted to protect the people's livelihoods," he said.

Controversial move

Mr Noda and members of his cabinet could make a formal decision by next week if the governor of Fukui prefecture, where the reactors are located, agrees.

But the move is extremely controversial, reports the BBC's Roland Buerk.

Earlier this week, a third of governing party members of parliament petitioned Mr Noda, urging him to exercise "greater caution" over the issue.

Protests met the prime minister's announcement in central Tokyo, with people waving placards stating, "We oppose restarts".

His statement was made only a few hours after the former president of the Fukushima plant operator testified before a high-profile investigative panel appointed by parliament.

Masataka Shimizu said that he did not consider a pullout of the plant's workers during the height of the crisis as had been alleged.

In April, the government set stricter safety guidelines for nuclear plants in a bid to win public confidence for restarts. These include the installation of filtered vents and a device to prevent hydrogen explosions.

Last month, the government asked businesses and households in parts of the country to cut electricity usage by up to 15% to avoid possible blackouts.