

Anger and Fear Follow Japan's Release of Radioactive Water

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Civic groups and politicians in Korea on Thursday expressed fierce opposition to Japan's decision to begin releasing treated radioactive water from the defunct Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

On Thursday afternoon, police took 16 university students into custody after they attempted to break into the Japanese Embassy in central Seoul to protest the discharge of the Fukushima water into the Pacific Ocean.

The students, members of civic groups opposed to the water's release, shouted slogans denouncing the discharge and the Yoon Suk Yeol government as they tried entering the Japanese Embassy in Seoul.

Tokyo Electric Power Company (Tepco), the operator of the plant, said it began releasing radioactive water from the crippled Fukushima nuclear power plant at 1 p.m. Thursday as planned.

A total of 7,800 tons of radioactive water, generated in the process of cooling reactor fuel at the plant after it experienced a meltdown due to an earthquake and tsunami in 2011, will be dumped into the Pacific over 17 days during the first release.

Environmental activists in Korea denounced the decision, calling it a "terror against humanity."

A union of environmental civic groups, including the Korea Federation for Environmental Movements, held a press conference at Gwanghwamun in central Seoul on Thursday morning to criticize the Japanese government, saying that the discharge will be historically recorded as "an act of nuclear terrorism against humanity."

The environmental activists argued that diluting the radioactive water with seawater would still “damage the environment as the total amount of radioactive material in the water will still be the same.”

“The Japanese government should promptly halt the dumping of Fukushima wastewater into the ocean,” a member of the environmental group said.

The members also criticized the Yoon Suk Yeol government for not standing up against the decision.

“The Korean government has never supported nor opposed the plan,” an environmental activist who attended Thursday’s rally said.



Democratic Party (DP) chief Lee Jae-myung, front left, and DP lawmakers hold a picket sign protesting Japan’s discharge of treated radioactive water from the defunct Fukushima nuclear power plant during the party’s emergency meeting held at the National Assembly in Yeouido, western Seoul. [NEWS1]

“We hope the government will express opposition against dumping the wastewater and demonstrate at least a minimum of responsibility to the public.”

The Korean government has not taken a clear stance regarding the discharge so far, although it had said the discharge would pose no “scientific or technical issue” if conducted according to Tepco’s plan.

In response to the discharge, the liberal Democratic Party (DP), which strongly condemned the release of treated contaminated water from Fukushima, said it would legislate measures to ban imports of seafood at risk of exposure to radioactive water.

The DP convened a parliamentary assembly Thursday and decided to push forward with a bill that stipulates banning imports of seafood exposed to wastewater.

The bill also offers compensation to people in the fishing industry who experience harm from

the seawater's radioactivity.

"The fishing industry is expected to see serious damage from the wastewater release," DP chief Lee Jae-myung said during his party's general assembly Thursday, adding that the party will promptly push forward a budget and bills for those affected by the discharge.

During the meeting, Lee criticized the Yoon government, urging it to no longer support "Japan's environmental crime."

The DP chief a day earlier strongly condemned the release, referring to the plan as an "act of terror."

Local governments also began drawing up measures as Japan's release of the treated wastewater sparked fears among citizens.

Eighty-four percent of Korean citizens opposed the release of wastewater in a survey conducted by local newspaper Hankook Ilbo and the Yomiuri Shinbun in Japan between May 26 and 28.

According to Busan Development Institute's survey from January to February, around 80 percent of respondents responded they believed the Fukushima wastewater discharge would be dangerous, even though it would not affect the radioactivity in the waters of Busan.

The Busan Metropolitan Government held an emergency meeting a day earlier to draw up responses to manage and protect the safety of seafood in the port city.

The city will conduct monitoring of the seawater by operating tools that promptly analyze the radioactivity of the water.

It also plans to establish a communication system with related institutes, such as university labs, to keep track of the radioactivity level of the city's waters.

The Seoul Metropolitan Government also announced its measures to secure safe seafood, which includes conducting sampling tests every day to check the radioactivity of seafood.

Safety tests that were only conducted on imported seafood will now be expanded to domestic seafood.

The city government will also begin a special inspection of 3,000 restaurants and stores that use seafood imported from Japan.

"We will try to make sure that people consume safe food by conducting tests as much as possible to check contamination and promptly releasing the result," Seoul Mayor Oh Se-hoon said during his visit to Seoul Public Health and Environment Research Institute under the metropolitan government after Japan began releasing the treated radioactive water on Thursday.

The institute conducts close radioactivity analysis on seafood and processed seafood foods distributed in the city.

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Featured image: Police on Thursday apprehend a university student who attempted to break into the Japanese Embassy in central Seoul to protest Japan's discharge of the treated radioactive water from the ruined Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. [YONHAP]

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