

Japan lifts evacuation order for town near doomed nuke plant

By Mari Yamaguchi
The Associated Press

NARAHHA, Japan — Japan’s government has lifted a four-and-a-half-year-old evacuation order for the northeastern town of Naraha that had sent all of the town’s 7,400 residents away following the disaster at the nearby Fukushima nuclear plant.

Naraha became the first to get the order lifted among seven municipalities forced to empty entirely due to radiation contamination following the massive earthquake and tsunami that sent the plant’s reactors into triple meltdowns in March 2011.

The central government has said radiation levels in Naraha have fallen to levels deemed safe following decontamination efforts.

According to a government survey, however, 53 percent of the evacuees from Naraha, which is 12 miles south of the nuclear plant, say they’re either not ready to return home permanently or are undecided. Some say they’ve found jobs elsewhere over the past few years, while others cite radiation concerns.

Naraha represents a test case, as most residents remain cautious amid lingering health concerns and a lack of infrastructure. In the once-abandoned town, a segment of a national railway is still out of service, with the tracks covered with grass. Some houses are falling down and wild boars roam around at night.

Only about 100 of the nearly 2,600



HESITANT HOMECOMING. A woman lights candles during a candlelight installation event in Naraha, Fukushima, northern Japan. Residents of Naraha returned to live in the town near the Fukushima nuclear power plant for the first time since the 2011 disaster. (AP Photo/Koji Sasahara)

services in July, and a shopping center will open next year. Still, many residents, especially those who don’t drive, face limited options for their daily necessities.

Residents have been given personal dosimeters to check their own radiation levels. To accommodate their concerns, the town is also running 24-hour monitoring at a water-filtration plant, testing tap water for radioactive materials.

Toshiko Yokota, a 53-year-old homemaker who had to leave her Naraha house after the disaster, said she came back to attend the ceremony and clean her home, and that she eventually wants to move back with her husband. Their house was damaged by rats, bugs, and rainwater leaks in their absence, and still needs to be fully renovated, but she hopes to return in a few years.

“My friends are all in different places because of the nuclear accident, and the town doesn’t even look the same, but this is still my hometown and it really feels good to be back,” said Yokota, who currently lives in another town in Fukushima prefecture.

“I still feel uneasy about some things, like radiation levels and the lack of a medical facility,” she said. “In order to come back, I have to keep up my hope and stay healthy.”

households have returned since a trial period began in April. Last year, the government lifted evacuation orders for parts of two nearby towns, but only about half of their former residents have returned.

Naraha mayor Yukiei Matsumoto said it marked an important milestone.

“Our clock started moving again,” he said during a ceremony held at a children’s park. “The lifting of the evacuation order is one key step, but this is just a start.”

Matsumoto said he hoped Naraha could set a good example of a recovering town for the other affected municipalities.

About 100,000 people from about 10

municipalities around the wrecked plant still cannot go home. The government hopes to lift all evacuation orders except for the most contaminated areas closest to the plant by March 2017 — a plan many evacuees criticize as an attempt to showcase Fukushima’s recovery ahead of the 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympics.

Matsumoto said fear of radiation and nuclear safety is still present, and that Naraha has a long way to go in its recovery. The town will be without a medical clinic until October, while a new prefectural hospital won’t be ready until February.

A grocery store started free delivery

Chinese district threatens to kill all pet dogs

BEIJING (AP) — A Chinese district government is giving dog owners a stark choice: Get rid of your pets or we’ll come to your home and kill them on the spot.

Even in a country where dog ownership is tightly regulated, the order issued by the Dayang New District in the eastern city of Jinan is extreme.

“No person is permitted to keep a dog of any kind,” said the notice posted on gateposts around the community of mostly high-rise apartment blocks. “Deal with it on your own, or else the committee will organize people to enter your home and club the dog to death right there.”

Regional governments have killed stray animals before, but Dayang’s order also covers dogs that have been registered and vaccinated.

Culls often follow outbreaks of rabies, a disease that kills about 2,000 Chinese each year, but the order cites only the maintenance of environmental hygiene and “everyone’s normal lives” as reasons.

People who answered calls at the district government office said no one was available to discuss the matter.

However, an unidentified worker from the Dayang village committee interviewed by a local television station insisted the order was the will of the majority of the district’s more than 1,000 residents.

“Dogs are always defecating all over the place and bothering people. A lot of people were complaining, so we wrote a public notice to avoid a conflict,” the man said.

The order underscores continuing weaknesses in China’s legal system, particularly when it comes to police powers and private-property protections. It also points to the lack of rules on pets in public, such as leash laws and fines for not cleaning up after them.

While China has laws protecting endangered species, it has yet to pass animal-cruelty legislation.

Chinese often appear sharply divided between animal lovers and those who see dogs as a threat to the public.

The keeping of dogs as pets was effectively outlawed during the first decades of the People’s Republic of China and was denounced by Communist leaders as a bourgeois affectation and waste of scarce resources.

Over the last 20 years, however, dog ownership has grown exponentially, despite continuing restrictions on large dogs in urban areas. A nascent animal-rights movement has also sprung up, with dog lovers sometimes blockading trucks shipping dogs off to markets to be served to the relatively small percentage who eat their meat.



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