

Media Mix by Philip Brasor

Film renews debate over renewables

Isahaya Bay

opening the gates. A provisional injunction from the government to halt the gates, saying it would drive the farmers to court in Nagasaki on Monday by ruling

it remains caught between two conflicting orders: one telling it to open the gates after the 2010 Isahaya Bay disaster and the government's order to close the gates a day to the fishing industry to honor the victims. The total damage is so far. An earlier court order to urge a government bailout of billion fisheries was in failure. Six years in courts that the fishermen are likely that the

gives a final resolution to the judiciary, it will be an abdication of its duty. The bureaucracy may be what has been

decided, it is not good at reviewing and altering a policy already in place. This is where elected lawmakers must step in to work out a political solution.

The government should consider whether there are means to revive the damaged fisheries grounds other than opening the floodgates, which the farmers would not accept. It should examine, for example, whether other factors like the construction of a new port facing the Ariake Sea and a dam on a river that empties into the sea are responsible for the changed sea environment. Such studies may lead to the discovery of a new way to revitalize it.

A political solution will require building trustful relationship with the parties involved. For that matter, farm minister Yuji Yamamoto has visited Isahaya only once — when he was tapped to the post last August. Instead of just repeating that the government will cope appropriately with the relevant lawsuits and make efforts to resolve the problem, he should sincerely listen to both the farmers and the fishermen to search for a mutually acceptable way out of the gridlock.



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Germany great

all about exports

Germany's exports have not been matched by imports — Germany runs a very large trade surplus. Under normal conditions, economists believe that if a country runs a trade surplus, its exchange rate should rise to cancel out some of the imbalance. But Germany is part of the eurozone, most of which is in an economic slump. That slump holds down the euro's exchange rate against that of many other countries, making German exports cheap. Also, the unified currency doesn't allow the exchange rates of slower-growing countries such as Greece or Spain to fall against Germany, meaning that Germany gets a boost to exports within Europe.

Some of Germany's export competitiveness, then, might be coming at the expense of other countries. And some

Earlier this month, Kyodo News surveyed 44 companies that started selling electricity to consumers after the energy market was liberalized in April 2016.

More than 60 percent of respondents objected to the government's plan to make them share in costs associated with compensating victims of the Fukushima nuclear crisis and the related cleanup. Since industry data shows that only 5.5 percent of Japanese households have opted to leave regional utilities for alternative suppliers, it seems doubtful that the objecting companies will persuade the government to change its mind.

These figures illustrate how regional power monopolies have swayed the public, as well as the government's role in helping them do so. The media has also had a hand in maintaining the status quo.

As the government doubles down on its determination to reopen Japan's nuclear power plants, a move the public is against, voices advocating for renewable energy have been muted. Instead, the media regurgitates the pro-nuclear narrative, which mainly has to do with cost and practicality: Renewables just aren't ready to take on the country's energy needs.

Hiroyuki Kawai, a lawyer at the center of the anti-nuclear movement, and Tetsunari Iida, a nuclear scientist at the forefront of the renewables campaign, have been working together since the Fukushima disaster in 2011. In standing up to the so-called nuclear village, a monolith of institutions with a stake in the future of nuclear energy and which includes the mainstream media, the two men have not been as successful as they would have liked. With the recent release of their documentary, "Nihon to Saisei" ("Japan and Rebirth"), they appear to be changing tactics.

The pair's previous films were mainly about the dangers of nuclear power. The effects of radiation unleashed by the Fukushima meltdown are still a matter of controversy that has overshadowed their main point, which is that renewables are superior to other energy sources, including nuclear, in every respect. The problem is that the Japanese media, in line with the government and industries that benefit from both nuclear and fossil fuel-based power, don't promote or even cover the benefits of renewables in a balanced way.

"Nihon to Saisei" is definitely advocacy filmmaking, but it says almost nothing



Politics of power: Hiroyuki Kawai (left) and Tetsunari Iida (center) discuss the economics of renewables with a banker in front of a geothermal apparatus in the town of Tsuchiyu Onsen in Fukushima Prefecture. © K PROJECT

monopolies. When production and transmission are decentralized, reliability increases because risk is dispersed. Millions of households are affected if a power plant fails due to natural disaster or human error. When a single household producing its own energy fails, only that household is affected.

The most common media myth about renewables is that they are inconsistent: Solar cells only provide energy when the sun shines; wind turbines only turn when it's windy. However, Kawai shows how a mix of different sources — not just solar and wind, but geothermal, hydro and biomass — can be easily controlled to provide a constant supply of localized energy that is more efficient than conventional power plants.

In Europe, this myth has been perpetuated by the claim that Germany cannot meet its power demand with renewables but has to import electricity from nuclear-powered France. By 2013, however, Germany was selling three times as much electricity to France as France was selling to Germany. By 2015, the trade balance in power was 50 terawatt-hours in Germany's favor.

Kawai and Iida address problems associated with renewables, specifically wind turbine noise and the danger they pose to flying birds, as well as a lack of recycling plans for old solar panels. They say these problems are being solved, but at any rate they can't compare to problems associated with nuclear and fossil fuels, which go beyond economics and safety.

U.S. military officials tell them they promote renewables in order to reduce armed conflicts, which are often caused by thwarted access to resources.

"Nihon to Saisei," which was released earlier this year, has had limited distribution in Japan, owing as much to its wonky presentation style as to its subject matter.

However, the film's message is that renewable energy is inevitable and the only matter up for debate is whether this future will arrive sooner or later.

For a schedule of public screenings, visit www.nihontogenpatsu.com/event.

about the perils of nuclear energy. What it says is that nuclear power is uneconomical and impractical, the two charges usually aimed at renewable energy in Japan.

Most of the data presented in the documentary was collected in countries overseas where renewables have taken root and which themselves have had to combat the same beliefs about financial and practical disadvantages.

The overarching theme is that Japan, an advanced technological society, is nevertheless lagging behind the rest of the industrialized world when it comes to energy self-sufficiency, a matter that baffles these countries. As the noted American physicist Amory Lovins tells Kawai at one point, it's bizarre that Japan isn't at the forefront of renewable technology considering how blessed it is with renewable energy sources. One German scientist estimates that Japan has nine times the renewable capacity that his country has.

Almost all of the interviews are with persons whose engagement with renewables is at the local level. Germany is a leader in this regard. In fact, the country's race toward renewables was accelerated by the Fukushima disaster.

An official of a town just outside of Frankfurt claims that their wind farm

'Nihon to Saisei' argues that nuclear power is uneconomical and impractical, the two charges usually aimed at renewable energy in Japan.

brings in the equivalent of ¥5 billion a year in revenue, which covers half the municipality's budget. Energy self-sufficiency is 262 percent.

Kawai and Iida then show how local governments in Japan are working toward their own goals of energy self-sufficiency despite "barriers." The regional monopolies own the transmission systems and limit how outside organizations can use them. Local leaders say they hope to revitalize their economies by developing renewable energy systems with the help of regional banks, thus creating jobs and reducing the financial burden on residents. However, they get little support from the central government, which has made licensing complicated.

It is this local angle that worries power