Ibaraki Governor vows not to allow restart of Tokai No. 2 nuclear plant

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MITO, Japan (Kyodo) -- Ibaraki Gov. Masaru Hashimoto said Thursday he will not consent to restarting the sole reactor at the Tokai No. 2 nuclear power plant in Tokaimura, which went offline in March 2011 just as a nuclear disaster unfolded in neighboring Fukushima Prefecture.

Hashimoto's pledge, coming on the day his campaigning for a seventh term as governor officially got under way, goes further than his previous stance on the issue, in which he had set conditions for a restart.

"I will not approve a restart," Hashimoto said at an event marking the start of his official campaign for the Aug. 27 gubernatorial election. "I will steer in the direction of not accepting nuclear power," he told his supporters.

The issue of restarting the nuclear power plant, which sits along the same Pacific coast as the tsunami-ravaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, is among the contentious issues in the election.

Hashimoto, 71, is pitted against two contenders: Kazuhiko Oigawa, a 53-year-old former company executive backed by the Liberal Democratic Party and the Komeito party, and Makomi Tsuruta, a 52-year-old head of a nonprofit group supported by the Japanese Communist Party.

In announcing his intention to run in the election back in July, Hashimoto set conditions for a restart of the power plant's sole reactor, saying, "We will not give consent to restarting unless the safety of the plant and the evacuation plan for it are shown to be viable."

The Japan Atomic Power Co. reactor was shut down automatically as a powerful earthquake hit Japan's northeast and caused a tsunami that went on to trigger multiple reactor meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in neighboring Fukushima.
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