

Feeling Safe Again After Fukushima

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AsianScientist (Jun. 11, 2012) - The government has to be more transparent in its policies and communicate them better to the public, says a Japanese scientist one year after the Fukushima nuclear plant accident.

Professor Takashi Shiraishi, President of the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS), was speaking at the *18th International Conference on the Future of Asia* on May 24, 2012 in Tokyo, Japan.

The dialogue was part of a *Science Opens New Frontiers for Asia's Future* session moderated by Junichi Taki, editorial writer and senior staff writer of science and technology at Nikkei, Inc.

Shiraishi was responding to a question posed by Taki, who asked whether there was a distrust of science and technology in Japan after the March 16, 2011 nuclear accident at the Fukushima Dai-ichi power plant.

"There is no 100 percent safety as it is based on quite complex systems," said Shiraishi, who pointed out that responsibility for the accident ultimately fell on the central government and its leaders.

"So who should take responsibility, the government must to a certain point take responsibility that if any accident happens, the prime minister must take responsibility," he said.

Shiraishi said the lack of communication with the public on the safety aspects of nuclear technology and the 2011 nuclear accident resulted its widespread rejection afterwards.

"In our science and technology plan, the feeling of 'safety' was not part of it, and after the disaster, there was a feeling that it should be included. In Japan, after the Fukushima accident, how people feel safe is an important factor," he said.

A certain level of "social restriction" already existed in Japan on the types of infectious disease research and genetic modification of crops that could be carried out, he said.

But that was not enough, Shiraishi noted, as political leaders must understand the science to effectively explain it to the public.

"Political leaders must learn about the science before they communicate to the public," he said. "The response by people in the field was praised by several researchers... the problem is the central government."

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