

# Ex-Fukushima execs to be charged over nuclear accident

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A trio of former executives from the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant will be indicted over the 2011 accident, a judicial review panel decided Friday, paving the way for the first criminal trial linked to the disaster.

The decision comes after prosecutors twice refused to press charges against the men, saying they had insufficient evidence and little chance of conviction.

But the independent panel on Friday ruled—for the second time since the accident—that the executives should be put on trial, compelling prosecutors to press on with the criminal case under Japanese law.

The decision is the latest in a tussle between legal authorities and the public over who should take responsibility for the tsunami-sparked reactor meltdowns that forced tens of thousands from their homes in the worst nuclear accident since Chernobyl.

The trio are former Tokyo Electric Power chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata, then-vice president Sakae Muto and former vice president Ichiro Takekuro.

"The victims have wanted a criminal trial given the anger and grief" over the accident, Ruiko Muto, a campaigner who called for charges, told reporters.

"We feel a sense of achievement that a criminal case will be held to

account for an accident that caused such tremendous damage."

The judicial panel is composed of ordinary citizens.

A parliamentary report has said Fukushima was a man-made disaster caused by Japan's culture of "reflexive obedience", but no one has been punished criminally.

An angry public has increasingly pointed to cosy ties among the government, regulators and nuclear operators that have allegedly insulated executives of the plant operator Tokyo Electric Power (TEPCO) from being charged.

Although the March 11 earthquake and tsunami killed 18,000 people, the [nuclear disaster](#) it caused is not officially recorded as having directly killed anyone.

The most lasting health impact of the Fukushima nuclear disaster will likely be psychological not physical, according to a trio of studies published Friday in *The Lancet*.

The judicial review panel issued the same ruling in July last year, hailed by thousands of plaintiffs who demanded charges be laid, but the prosecutors gave up charging the former executives in January after re-opening their investigation into the case.

Campaigners have called for about three dozen company officials to be held accountable for their failure to take proper measures to protect the site against the tsunami, which sparked the worst atomic crisis in a generation.

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