

Denki Shimbun Holds Forum on Japan's 50 Years of Nuclear Power

On November 14, the Denki Shimbun ("Electricity Newspaper") held its second forum, entitled "Fifty Years of Nuclear Power Development: Issues and Roles Toward New Growth," in Tokyo.

The opening address was delivered by Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata of the Federation of Electric Power Companies (FEPC), who concurrently serves as the president of the Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO). In his greetings, he said, "This year has seen several bright developments for nuclear power, and as such it has been a year of progress. I can list several on the domestic front: the Cabinet's confirmation (on Oct. 11) of the Fundamental Principles for the Nuclear Policy Program, the resumption of the Nuclear Power Subcommittee of the Advisory Committee for Natural Resources and Energy, headway being made at the Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant, measures to arrange the legal framework for the backend project, efforts by the electric power companies to implement the MOX fuel project, and the siting of an interim storage facility. Those were augmented by the renewed appreciation of nuclear power worldwide."

He continued, "Nonetheless, a slew of unresolved issues remains, and some of those cannot be solved by the electric power industry alone. While it is reassuring to see the efforts by governmental bodies to lay down the necessary conditions, we should not stand back and presume upon their work, but instead strive for the improvement of safety and product quality, our highest priorities."

Katsumata's comments were followed by a keynote speech given by Chairman Shunsuke Kondo of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), who outlined the main points of the recently passed Fundamental Principles for the Nuclear Policy Program.



Next on the forum schedule was a panel debate, with AEC Chairman Kondo, parliamentarian Akira Amari, Gov. Masaru Hashimoto of Ibaraki Prefecture, Director General Nobuyori Kodaira of the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy (ANRE), and FEPC Vice-chairman Teruaki Masumoto exchanging views on such issues as the deregulation of electric power and nuclear power generation, measures to improve the capacity factor of NPPs, and the division of responsibilities between the national government and local municipalities.

Regarding the issue of electricity deregulation, ANRE Director General Kodaira made the following point: "The development of new reactors is problematic in the context of the market alone, but it is important to take a long-range perspective of joint development and operation, keeping in mind the experience of foreign countries." FEPC's Masumoto then commented, "We will have to replace an average of two units yearly starting in 2025, but it will be a hurdle getting the necessary funds and the understanding of local residents. As a practical matter, we will already start experiencing problems in this area just five or ten years hence, and the electric power companies will face a choice between carrying out developments individually or jointly, based on the scale of the enterprise."

As far as the capacity factor is concerned, Ibaraki Gov. Hashimoto said, "We cannot secure the trust of local communities with the repeated occurrence of minor mistakes. The public can feel at ease only when a firm record of safe performance is built up. The national government

must work actively in finding the answer to raising the capacity factor and securing plant safety and peace of mind of the people.” ANRE’s Kodaira added, “It is necessary to develop a regulatory framework that provide incentives to operators,” while AEC Chairman Kondo said, “It is important to create an environment where originality and ingenuity are allowed.”

Various opinions were also entertained about the relationship between the national government and local communities. Diet member Amari said, “The Energy Policy Basic Law has been formulated under the premise that there will be the support of a cooperative relationship formed among the national government, local municipalities, and residents in the vicinity.” ANRE’s Kodaira then said, “While nuclear power cannot be pursued without establishing coexistence with local communities, both the National Diet and the Nuclear Power Subcommittee have pointed the undesirability of having independent inspections and verifications carried out by local municipalities.” Gov. Hashimoto replied, “Certain municipalities distrust the national government, so a certain amount of double-checking cannot be helped.”

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