

Cabinet Reshuffle: METI and MEXT Ministers Retain Posts

On August 27, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan announced the lineup of his reshuffled cabinet, keeping both Minister Akira Amari of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) and Minister Bunmei Ibuki of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) in their positions.



On the evening of the 27th, Minister Amari held a press conference at the METI building in Tokyo (see photo). He said that as far as nuclear energy was concerned, all efforts would be made to ensure people's peace of mind toward [nuclear facilities' ability to withstand] earthquakes. In addition, in regards to the spacing of regular inspections within the new inspection system, he said, "As it is a matter to be judged on a plant-by-plant basis, [the spacing of inspections] will not be lengthened uniformly. I would like to dispel any misunderstanding concerning that point."

While he was tapped to retain his post as METI minister, Amari was directed by Prime Minister Abe to follow six policy items: (1) the promotion of a growth strategy, (2) the revitalization of small and medium-sized enterprises as well as that of Japan's regions, (3) the promotion of the WTO agreements, (4) the pursuit of product safety, (5) the pursuit of nuclear safety, and (6) the adoption of energy-related and environmental measures. In the press conference, the Minister said that the main tasks facing METI included the promotion of economic partnership agreements (EPAs) and resource diplomacy, along with integrated solutions to global warming, energy security and economic growth, all premised on nuclear safety.

As for pressing issues in the wake of the July 16 earthquake, Amari mentioned the need to thoroughly implement safety measures to ensure peace of mind, saying, "Checks are now being made under the new seismic guidelines. It is important, first of all, that the evaluations are made in an appropriate and accurate fashion. In line with that, I would like to promote the sharing of earthquake-related data both domestically and abroad. The latest earthquake revealed problems in information transmission, the local firefighting system, and the earthquake resistance of collateral facilities, among others, and measures must be put in place to deal with them so that the Japanese public can get peace of mind regarding nuclear energy."

In reference to the new inspection system, the METI Minister said, "The spacing between regular inspections [of nuclear reactors] in Japan is uniformly short. It's not sufficient just to stop plants and make inspections, as it is sometimes effective for the improvement of safety to inspect plants while they are in operation. I would like to enhance understanding of that fact."

Editor: Noriyuki Ishii, JAIF