

Increased Nuclear Technology Cooperation Between Japan and Australia

On September 9, at the latest Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Forum, held in Sydney, Australia, talks were held between Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Australian Prime Minister John Howard, in which they agreed to expand discussions between senior officials of the two countries, as well as to focus on uranium trading and nuclear energy-related issues of mutual interest at those next meetings. Besides the issues of trade, transport, and investment in uranium, technology and research cooperation are also expected to be on the agenda. In line with that, there will also be opportunities scheduled for discussions by private-sector businesses.

In 1982, both governments concluded the Japan-Australia Nuclear Energy Cooperation Agreement (valid for 30 years, and automatically renewable). Up until now, it has mainly involved Japan's import of natural uranium from Australia, which now serves as the major supplier of uranium imported into the country (in 2004, 33% of domestically-used uranium in Japan came from Australia). This time, both countries reflected on their cooperative relationship so far, and discussed the possibility of cooperation in new areas as well. In the field of peaceful utilization of nuclear energy, they agreed to boost the relationship built up so far.

Prime Minister Howard also demonstrated a strong interest in participating in the Generation IV International Forum (GIF), which Japan and other countries are now pursuing to develop a new type of reactor, and Prime Minister Abe said he supported Australia's participation.

In addition, the two leaders pledged to step up cooperation in nuclear technology in Asia, announcing that it would "encourage the development of nuclear energy in the region as a clean form of energy." Through activities related to nuclear energy applications, such as the use of radiation, in the Forum for Nuclear Cooperation in Asia (FNCA), which is composed of Australia, Japan and other East Asian countries, the two countries hope to expand their cooperation for the development of a nuclear safety culture in the region.

Also, the two nations agreed to cooperate on such issues as nuclear nonproliferation, nuclear safety, and nuclear security.

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