

METI to Strengthen International Nuclear Cooperation

Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) plans to further reinforce its activities aimed at international nuclear cooperation. In addition to direct assistance to those countries expected to introduce nuclear power for the first time (including providing knowhow for nuclear safety systems), Japan will also participate in similar activities through the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). At the same time, METI will establish a new framework for international cooperative efforts, including the Generation IV International Forum (GIF) and the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership (GNEP). It has already included those measures in its budget requests for the upcoming fiscal year, which starts on April 1, 2008.

As for Japan's assistance to countries planning to introduce nuclear power for the first time, METI requested JPY 160 million – 2.2 times the current budget – through commissions to investigate the possibility of introducing nuclear reactors. The Ministry will primarily consider assistance to such countries in Asia, including Indonesia, Vietnam and Kazakhstan. Japan established cooperative relationships with Indonesia and Vietnam in FY06. While it already sends experts to both countries, Japan will further expand its assistance to comprise the development of infrastructure in preparation for nuclear introduction. That will include: (1) the establishment of nuclear nonproliferation systems, (2) the introduction of safety regulation systems, (3) the development of nuclear liability systems, and (4) the development of human resources.

Besides the activities it has planned itself, Japan will also participate in activities carried out by the IAEA as part of that agency's promotion of assisting the development of infrastructure in countries planning to introduce nuclear power. The IAEA sends review missions consisting of international expert groups to such countries to ensure, among other things, nuclear nonproliferation and nuclear safety. METI newly requested about JPY 100 million in its budget for the upcoming fiscal year for contributions to the IAEA for development of infrastructure in countries expected to introduce nuclear power. It also requested JPY 160 million – 2.1 times the current budget – to contribute to the IAEA's investigation and evaluation activities for improving safety at nuclear power plants (NPPs).

Meanwhile, a new framework for international technological cooperation will be established in the upcoming fiscal year as part of subsidies for R&D on innovative and practical nuclear technology. Among others, the subsidies aim at: (1) assisting in the development of innovative technology based on suggestions submitted by the public, (2) promoting the development of basic technology at universities, and (3) developing human resources. METI, via international cooperation, will assist in the development of technology related to generation-IV reactors and innovative reactor technology so as to cope with the diversified needs of developing countries. Budget requests for the new framework total JPY 800 million. The ministry will subsidize innovative technology, which will enable participation in international cooperation frameworks such as GIF and GNEP, particularly in cases where commercialization is anticipated.

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