

51st JAIF Annual Conference
Opening Remarks by Chairman Imai
April 9, 2018

(Introduction)

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I am Takashi Imai, Chairman of the Japan Atomic Industrial Forum. It is my pleasure to give a few remarks at the outset of this year's annual conference, our 51st.

(Current status of Fukushima Daiichi, and the recovery of Fukushima)

A good seven years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011. Over this period, the working environment at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station has improved considerably, and measures have achieved a certain milestone to reduce the amount of water retained or being generated in the reactor buildings. Safe removal of spent fuel and the disposal of treated water are still to be tackled at the site.

Concerning Fukushima Prefecture's recovery, a session is devoted tomorrow to the current situation in Fukushima, in which progress of an ongoing highlight topic of the government-sponsored "Innovation Coast Framework" for revitalization will be presented. However, quite a few issues yet remain to be resolved, too, such as the damage due to groundless harmful rumors about the products grown or produced in Fukushima.

The nuclear industry must continue its concerted efforts toward the full recovery and revival of Fukushima Prefecture.

(Energy policies)

Some of you may remember a big snowstorm hit Japan in February this year. In the affected areas, electricity demand increased because of the cold weather, but the supply was limited because solar panels were snow-covered for days. In the Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) service areas, the supply was even jeopardized. TEPCO could manage to avoid blackouts by the existing power interconnection arrangements with neighboring power utilities.

Unlike in Europe, Japan is surrounded by an ocean, and not internationally power-connected. Therefore, in order for Japan to expand use of renewable energy supplies, the country needs by itself to provide all the facilities, equipment and systems for absorbing energy output variations. This costs much time and money. It is not possible to change the energy balance in a limited period by introducing substantial amounts of renewable energy.

From that perspective, I doubt the feasibility of the so-called “No Nuclear Power Basic Law” bill proposed by opposition parties last month to the Diet Lower House.

If we do not face reality, by rejecting nuclear power and continuing to rely on thermal power as we do now, we will not be able to achieve the CO2 emission reduction target by the year 2030 that Japan has pledged to the international community.

In other words, “Coexistence of renewable energies and atomic energy IS crucial for ensuring the economic and stable utilization of electric power while facing global environmental concerns. It is important, while expanding the use of renewable energies, that nuclear power generation continue, once safety of the plants has been confirmed.

In addition, for achieving a goal of eighty-percent reduction in CO2 levels by the year 2050, construction of new nuclear power plants will play a major role.

(Maximum utilization of existing plants)

As for the situation of restarting existing nuclear power plants, Ohi-3 and Genkai-3 were restarted in February. However, only seven units out of 39, including these two, have cleared the new safety regulations and been restarted to date. A couple of units have been ordered by the court to suspend their operation, even after they successfully cleared the new regulations.

Thermal plants are deployed primarily as substitutes for nuclear power units in outage. Thermal plants not only emit a lot of CO2, but their fuel costs place an increasing financial burden on the nation for expanding power production. A delay in restarting nuclear unit operations affects the country’s plutonium utilization policy adversely, too.

Safety measures at Japan’s nuclear power plants have been significantly upgraded after the 2011 earthquake disaster. It is our hope that safety reviews under the new regulations can be expedited so that the existing nuclear power plants can be utilized to the maximum extent.

(The forty-year rule)

The Tokai Daini Nuclear Power Station is now in the process of safety review. If the units reach the age of forty before the review is concluded, the operating licenses expire and the units are ruled to be decommissioned. As seen in this example, the so-called “forty-year rule” is not reasonable and should be revised.

(Global expansion)

Globally, China, Russia, India, etc. are actively promoting new and additional builds of nuclear power units. The total capacities of the world's nuclear power plants reached 409 million kilowatts (kW) last year, setting a record high for the third year in a row. Nuclear power generation is really growing and expanding.

Under such circumstances, elevated expectations are being placed by oversea entities on Japanese technology, knowledge and experience. Some Japanese nuclear vendors are currently engaged actively in projects in such countries as UK and Turkey. I look forward to the success of those projects as they overcome various difficulties in their path.

(Development of human resources)

For nuclear energy to contribute to the future, it is important to secure and develop human resources in plant design, construction, operation, maintenance, decommissioning and other activities.

To secure capable resources, efforts are necessary to indicate clearly to society at large the value of nuclear energy, the role it plays, and its future. Additionally, to develop the necessary human resources, a live and active field environment is more valuable than anything else.

New projects are also important; people must have dreams and motivations toward nuclear energy. "Innovations in nuclear power" is a session theme of Tomorrow. Innovations are not limited to only development of new reactors. Application of new technologies such as digital technologies in plant operation, maintenance, and the like also can be innovative.

It is my belief that capable young people will find reasons to become engaged in nuclear power generation if applications of such innovative new technologies present the attractiveness of nuclear technology.

(Thoughts on this year's conference)

The theme chosen for this year's JAIF Annual Conference, the 51st, is "Nuclear Power, a Key Energy Solution for the Future". In today's and tomorrow's sessions we will review and discuss the issues of "Energy Policy," "Current Status of Restoration in Fukushima," "Promotion of International Activities by Nuclear Vendors," and "Innovations in Nuclear Power." I look forward to its productive outcome.

Before concluding my remarks, please accept my heartfelt gratitude to all distinguished speakers for taking the podium, and to all participants from Japan and abroad for taking time and assembling here for discussions.

Thank you very much.

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