

Japan to reconsider energy policy

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A rethink of Japan's energy policy following the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant has been announced by the country's prime minister Naoto Kan. Nuclear will remain a "pillar" in Japan's energy supply, he said.

As Japan has few natural resources of its own, it depends on imports for some 80% of its primary energy needs and currently relies on its 50 nuclear power reactors to generate some 30% of its electricity. A significant expansion in the use of nuclear energy had been proposed under the country's basic energy plan.

But in reaction to the Fukushima crisis, Kan said yesterday, "I think it is necessary to discuss from scratch the current basic energy plan, under which the share of nuclear energy is expected to be more than 50% in 2030, while more than 20% will come from renewable power."



Kan announces a rethink on energy policy (Image: Office of the Prime Minister)

He noted, "The past energy policy has regarded nuclear energy and fossil fuels as two major pillars in electricity. With the recent accident, I think two additional pillars are important. The first additional pillar is to add renewable energy, such as solar and wind power as well as biomass, to be one of the core energy resources. The second additional pillar is to create an energy-saving society where energy will not be used as much as it is now."

Kan said, "I would like to add renewable energy and energy saving as two major pillars and to exert further efforts to achieve them, while promoting safety of nuclear energy and reducing carbon dioxide from fossil fuels. Based on these thoughts, I would like to accelerate the discussion on reviewing the overall energy policy."

He said that, with regards to nuclear energy, the most important thing to do is to ensure safety. Kan said that further inspections of nuclear power plants are needed to further improve their safety. In addition, he called on the government to consider how nuclear safety can be ensured.

Kan also suggested that Japan strives to inform the international community of its experience of the Fukushima accident and what it has learned from it, so that nuclear safety worldwide can be strengthened as a result.

Kan announced that the government is preparing to launch a committee dedicated to investigating the cause of the Fukushima nuclear accident. He said the committee would be based on three principles: independence, openness and comprehensiveness. The new committee, he said, would be independent from the existing nuclear energy administration. Its findings would be made available to the public and the international community and would cover not only the technical aspects of the accident, but also the existing systems and the structure of institutions.

The prime minister also noted that progress has been made in a compensation scheme for the accident. Kan said that it was the responsibility of both the plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co (Tepco), and the government to ensure that compensation is "carried out properly."

Speaking at a press conference, Kan said: "The direct causes of the recent accident at the nuclear power plants were the earthquake and tsunami. However, the government, which has promoted the nuclear energy policy as a national policy along with Tepco, the operator, is also responsible for failing to prevent such accidents. As the prime minister, who is responsible for this, I would like to apologize to the public of Japan."

*Researched and written
by World Nuclear News*