

Disappointing Proposal Regarding Nuclear Issue

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A June 25 proposal by Prime Minister Naoto Kan's advisory panel on how best to reconstruct northeastern Japan after the March 11 giant earthquake fails to provide sufficient responses to the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant crisis and any sensible energy strategy for the future. At a time when the nuclear crisis is a top priority issue, the proposal by the Reconstruction Design Council is disappointing.

Absence of cool analyses

The 39-page "Proposal for Reconstruction" spared only three pages for the nuclear disaster. The portion cites damage both from atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant accident. Such treatment of the accident could sensationally add to the jitters about nuclear energy. It lacks cool analyses on radioactive damage. While calling for introducing such renewable energy sources as solar energy and wind power, it fails to specify whether Japan should abandon or maintain nuclear power plants.

On the day before the proposal was made public, our Japan Institute for National Fundamentals sponsored a monthly study meeting where researchers and a politician discussed radioactive damage from the nuclear power plant accident.

"Exposure to low radiation levels of up to 20 millisieverts per year can increase a cancer death probability by only 0.1 percentage point," said Ken Yamauchi, president of the Shizuoka Cancer Center. Noting anti-cancer measures could easily lower the death probability, he called for cooler responses to health damage from the nuclear plant accident.

Yamaguchi criticized the evacuation of residents within a certain radius from the Fukushima Daiichi plant as unscientific and unreasonable. "The government should set allowable radiation exposure limits at higher levels for middle-aged and older residents who are invulnerable to radiation and leave them to decide themselves whether to evacuate their homes. This could help prevent them from committing suicide."

Energy security should be given priority

In response, Prime Minister Kan's special adviser Goshi Hosono explained the evacuation order for residents within a 20-kilometer radius from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant as a preparation for possible hydrogen explosions within nuclear reactor containers. This was the first such explanation. Hosono, a Democratic lawmaker

in the House of Representatives, also said the government could allow the relevant residents to return home if the nuclear reactors are stabilized. If so, the government should disclose such plan and relevant information to citizens.

Although the proposal by the Reconstruction Design Council leaves the positioning on nuclear energy vague, Hajimu Yamana, professor at the Kyoto University's Research Reactor Institute, emphasized that nuclear energy cannot be abandoned for energy security to ensure stable supply of inexpensive energy. He also noted that natural gas thermal power generators are required as a backup for renewable energy-based power generation, while many problems still exist regarding natural gas supply. "Abandoning nuclear power generation means a weakening of energy security," he added.

We doubt if the Reconstruction Design Council has enough understanding on the significance of nuclear power plants to the present and future Japanese industry. None can ignore the nuclear plant issue in considering the reconstruction of Japan. Nevertheless, Prime Minister Kan had initially instructed the council to put nuclear plants out of agenda.

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