

'Something wrong' in TEPCO's safety culture

The Associated Press

TOKYO, Nov. 28 (Kyodo) — The chief of Japan's nuclear regulatory authority on Wednesday suggested that Tokyo Electric Power Co. needs to improve its safety culture if it wants to resume its idled reactors, touching on a series of problems seen before the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi complex last year.

Referring to deformed sections of spent fuel rods at TEPCO's Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in Niigata Prefecture and the revelation in 2002 of the utility's coverup of defects, Shunichi Tanaka told a press conference, "To tell the truth, I think there may be something wrong (with this utility)."

"People on site, with their enthusiasm, knowledge and ability, should serve as a defense that prevents accidents and problems from occurring. But I wonder whether that function is working properly," he said, stressing the need for a change if the utility wants to "keep operating nuclear plants."

TEPCO operates the Fukushima Daiichi and Daini plants, in addition to the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant, none of which are currently online. TEPCO is aiming to restart reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant from April next year.

Earlier in the day, Tanaka ordered the secretariat of the Nuclear Regulation Authority to conduct hearings on the "determination" of TEPCO's management personnel to address the string of problems.

"I know TEPCO's management team is in an extremely difficult situation because it has to deal with the nuclear accident, but I cannot overlook this matter," Tanaka said during a meeting of nuclear regulatory authority members.

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