

[朝日新聞デジタル Japanese](#) [朝日新聞中文网 Chinese](#) [Asahi Asia Antenna - 독자와 함께 Korean](#)

EDITORIAL: New Diet probe into Fukushima disaster called for

February 08, 2013

0

An unbelievable act of folly has come to light.

A year ago, Tokyo Electric Power Co. misled a Diet investigation panel looking into the March 2011 disaster at Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, causing it to abandon an on-site inspection of the plant's crippled No. 1 reactor.

Even though there was lighting, TEPCO erroneously informed the panel that the building housing the reactor was "pitch dark and dangerous."

From the outset of the disaster, some experts have suggested that crucial equipment designed to keep the reactor cool could have been damaged by the impact of the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake before the tsunami struck. The Diet panel's on-site inspection was supposed to uncover what really happened there.

In response to the recent revelation, TEPCO's public relations department said it did not intentionally make a false report. But this is utterly unconvincing. If it had looked into the situation with the intent of fully cooperating with Diet investigators, it would have immediately ascertained there was no problem as far as lighting was concerned.

On Feb. 7, a former member of the Diet panel that received the original TEPCO finding submitted written requests to the chiefs of the two chambers of the Diet calling for an on-site investigation and a hearing for TEPCO.

Although the Diet panel has already disbanded, a Lower House special commission on the nuclear energy problem was established in the Diet in late January.

Since the revelation showed that TEPCO did not take the authority of the Diet seriously, the new commission should exercise its full powers to unravel the truth. There is also a need to consider setting up a new Diet panel to mount a fresh investigation with more experts.

Getting to the bottom of the Fukushima disaster is closely related to the question of steps that need to be taken to prevent a recurrence of similar accidents.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority, the new nuclear industry watchdog, is currently engaged in drafting new safety guidelines for nuclear plants. Whether crucial equipment was damaged by the initial shaking in the Fukushima disaster will be an important factor in outlining measures for reactors to withstand the impact of a major quake.

Of the three investigative panels set up by the government, the Diet and the private sector, respectively, the government panel decided that the functions of important equipment were not impaired by the quake. Its finding was based mainly on reports by TEPCO. The private panel failed to secure TEPCO's cooperation and was unable to dig directly into the cause of the accident.

The Diet panel demanded an on-site inspection on grounds that emergency condensers used to cool nuclear reactors in emergencies could have been damaged by the impact of the earthquake. But the inspection was thwarted due to TEPCO's false explanation.

If nothing is done to rectify the situation, the new safety guidelines the NRA is now working on may end up riddled with holes in terms of quake preparedness.

TEPCO, for starters, should come forward to provide full details of what happened at the plant. If a new Diet investigation gets under way, the company should offer its fullest cooperation.

TEPCO had a history of repeatedly covering up accidents and making false reports to the government on its nuclear facilities even before the Fukushima disaster occurred.

After the accident, it made progress in terms of accountability by partially disclosing images of in-house video conferences. As for safety reform, however, the steps taken to date are far from adequate.

More than anything else, clarifying the cause of the accident serves the public interest. Having received a massive amount in public funds, if TEPCO fails to recognize this point, it does not deserve to be called a public-interest corporation.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Feb. 8