IAEA states for stricter nuclear controls, funding unclear

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International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director-General Yukiya Amano (L) speaks during a press-conference on the last day of a five-day ministerial conference on nuclear safety at the Austria center in Vienna. IAEA members are in favour of strengthening checks on nuclear power plants, but how this should be financed was still up in the air, the atomic watchdog's chief said.

IAEA members are in favour of strengthening checks on nuclear power plants, but how this should be financed was still up in the air, the UN atomic watchdog's chief said here Friday.

"There is such a strong support for increasing and strengthening the activities of the Agency, to enhance our safety," Yukiya Amano, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), told journalists at the end of a week-long conference here to discuss the lessons learnt from the disaster at Japan's Fukushima nuclear plant.

"I am very optimistic that we can get extensive support from the member states to raise funds," he added.

However, under the agency's current budget, "I don't think we have sufficient financial resources to fund future activities."

Future funds for nuclear checks could be drawn from member states but also from the private sector, Amano already suggested earlier this week.

The agency's 151 member states said in a final declaration Friday that regular safety checks should be carried out in all nuclear power plants and recommended that nuclear safety standards be generally reinforced.

This supported proposals made at the start of the conference on Monday, said Amano.

This handout picture, taken by Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) on June 22 shows workers adjusting meters of temporary facilities at the second reactor at TEPCO's Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant at Okuma town in Fukushima prefecture. IAEA members are in favour of strengthening checks on nuclear power plants, but how this should be financed was still up in the air.

The IAEA chief had then suggested a combination of domestic and international measures: "National assessments are the starting points, but they should be followed by IAEA international expert peer reviews."

What the reviews would actually look like had yet to be determined however, including whether the countries in question would accept external reviews.

"I will prepare an action plan detailing the way ahead which will be submitted to the September board of governors and general conference," Amano said Friday.

The conference's president, Brazil's Antonio Guerreiro, admitted: "The agency does not have the legal authority to go anywhere and carry out these missions."

But he called on member states to demonstrate good will, request checks and accept those requested by the IAEA.

The main result to come out of the IAEA's conference this week was the need "to make nuclear power plants as safe as possible as quickly as possible," Amano also said, calling on states to use the momentum created by the Fukushima disaster to arrive quickly at effective solutions.

Nuclear safety has re-emerged as a serious concern worldwide following an earthquake and tsunami on March 11 that caused a nuclear crisis at Japan's Fukushima nuclear plant.

A month ago European nations agreed on stress tests to be carried out from June on the continent's reactors, after splits over whether to include the threat of terror attacks or other man-made disasters.

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