

Russia drafts ambitious nuclear power plan

Good ... it's about time the world's leaders, Russia and USA, stood up to the plate.

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Russia's atomic agency is drafting an ambitious program to build two nuclear reactors a year to make nuclear power account for a quarter of the nation's energy by 2030, officials said Tuesday.

Russia currently has 31 reactors at 10 nuclear power plants, accounting for 16-17 percent of the country's electricity generation, and President Vladimir Putin has called for raising the share to 25 percent.

Stanislav Antipov, head of the state Rosenergoatom consortium that oversees Russian nuclear power plants, said the Cabinet is to discuss a federal program in March or April, which would propose funding and other measures to achieve the goal.

In recent years, Russia has overcome a public backlash against nuclear power that followed the April 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster, and the government has supported efforts to revive the nuclear industries.

Antipov told a news conference Russia has retained the core of the former Soviet nuclear industries, providing sufficient technological capacity for setting up the program.

The money would come from the consortium's own resources, the state budget and private investors, which would likely include Russia's Gazprom natural gas giant.

"Gazprom has expressed a desire to participate in building new reactors," Antipov said, adding the plan would allow Russia to save significant natural gas resources for exports.

"It's very advantageous for the state," he added.

It takes Rosenergoatom about five years to build a nuclear reactor, and the company would have to work on 10 reactors simultaneously to achieve the goal of commissioning two reactors a year, Antipov said.

Federal Nuclear Agency chief Sergei Kiriyenko said recently that Russia would have to build 40 new reactors to raise the share of power that comes from nuclear energy to 25 percent.

Rosenergoatom's technical director, Nikolai Sorokin, said Russia would continue extending the lifetime of Soviet-built nuclear reactors, which were designed for 30-year operation.

He said nine reactors already had their lifetime extended by 15 years.

The process will include all Russia's 11 RBMK-type reactors, the same kind as the one that exploded at the Chernobyl plant in then-Soviet Ukraine in the world's worst commercial nuclear catastrophe. One RBMK-type reactor at the Leningrad power plant near St.Petersburg already had its operational life extended by 15 years, and two others will follow suit this year, Sorokin said.

Sorokin insisted numerous checks by the International Atomic Energy Agency and other agencies had shown Chernobyl-type reactors meeting all safety requirements.

Antipov said Rosenergoatom also has drafted a plan to build six or seven floating nuclear reactors to provide electricity to distant Arctic areas. The first such reactor mounted on a barge is expected to be launched in three years.

He dismissed environmentalists' concerns about the floating reactors, saying they would meet all safety requirements.