

Morocco Rules Out Nuclear Option to Ease Oil Burden

Morocco is temporarily OK and in the future can also import electricity from more advanced countries

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Morocco said on Thursday it has no plan to build nuclear plants to ease the burden of higher imported crude oil on state finances.

"There is no Moroccan programme to build nuclear power stations in the country," Energy and Mines Minister Mohamed Boutaleb told reporters on the sidelines of the two-day Marrakech's Maghreb and Mediterranean Oil and Gas conference which ends on Thursday.

His remarks followed reports in local newspapers that Morocco, the only North African country without oil of its own, will launch a bold plan to build nuclear plants to trim the cost of its oil imports.

Newspapers named Maamoura, outside Casablanca, as the site of the first of planned nuclear power stations.

"Maamoura's Nuclear Studies Center is a research laboratory to produce isotopes used in medicine, agriculture, energy and mines," Boutaleb said.

Morocco's energy imports rose 29 percent in the first quarter of this year causing its trade deficit to widen by 17.3 percent for the period versus the same quarter in 2005.

Morocco will seek to take advantage of its proximity to Europe and North Africa's oil and gas producing countries to cooperate with its partners to build oil, gas and power networks and pipelines via its territory to feed the European market.

"Morocco already plays a role in setting up such power and gas networks and can do more in that," said Amina Benkhadra, managing director of the state-owned Hydrocarbons and Mines National Office.

She was referring to electricity grid links between Morocco and Spain and the Mediterranean gas pipeline carrying gas from Algeria to Spain via Morocco.