

## Authorities accused of errors

*It is dangerous to invite Nils to comment!*

The Budapest News  
September 30, 2004

NILS J Diaz, Chairman of the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) on Friday blamed the Hungarian authorities for last-year's malfunction at the nuclear power plant in Paks (108km south of Budapest). Diaz was invited to Hungary by the Hungarian atomic energy office OAH and during his stay visited the Paks plant to inquire about the follow up and consequences of what he called "a serious incident".

Diaz told press after his meeting with state officials and management at Paks, "The operator undoubtedly committed some errors and, I suppose, so did the licensing authorities." He suggested that the incident may have otherwise been a "combined consequence of several factors". After seeing that all was well and properly maintained at the nuclear plant, Diaz explained on a more optimistic note, "The management [at Paks] has everything under control. I was completely reassured after my visit."

Paks's second power generating block was due to return on line on May 1, 2003, after its annual maintenance, but after an accident damaged fuel rods and resulted in a minor leak, the block remained dormant, until late August, 2004.

Observers said that they believed that strong political pressure from the government had forced the block to go back on line with test runs in late August, with full power production since September 1 of this year to once again generate power for the Hungry domestic market.

Hungary has very few natural energy sources and must otherwise import power when Paks is down. The politically motivated move was said to have been made to help the government fill the gaps in its swelling budget deficit.

For every day that Paks Block-2 did not generate power the state lost Ft50 million (\$246,300).

Observers said that the re-start was expected as Paks management had calculated Block-2 in its business plan for 2004, estimating 120-130 days of operation this year.

István Kocsis, CEO of Paks, said in an earlier interview that based on this year's first half figures Paks was unlikely to exceed its targeted Ft4.7 billion (\$23.15 million) loss for the year.

Following an investigation by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), a report showed that the cause of the melt-down, which occurred on April 10, 2003, was due to the carelessness of the German-French consortium Framatome ANP.

This consortium maintained and operated the cleaning tank in which the 30 bundles of fuel rods were damaged and are currently still submerged, only meters away from where strong nuclear reactions are taking place in the reactor unit of Block-2.

The Russian nuclear company TVEL has still not salvaged the rods (for which, when completed, it will receive \$4.5 million, after it was announced as the winner of the rescue tender, beating Framatome ANP, which also made a bid). The technical glitch that

caused the problem was first registered as "one" on the seven-grade international nuclear events scale (INES), but later this was modified to "three" after the news broke that there had also been radioactive gas emissions from the tank escaping into the atmosphere.

Paks is almost 100% owned by the State-held power wholesaler Magyar Villamos Mûvek Rt (MVM) and when running at full capacity is said to produce 38% of Hungary's total power requirements.