

Kazakhstan Will Forge Ahead With Nuclear Plan After Japan

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ASTANA, Kazakhstan - Kazakhstan, the world's largest uranium miner, will press ahead with plans to build its first nuclear power plant, undeterred by Japan's post-earthquake nuclear crisis, a senior Kazakh official said Wednesday.

"The well-known events in Japan have given rise to radiophobia," Duisenbai Turganov, deputy minister of industry and new technologies, told a conference on power engineering.

"But all the same, we believe that the construction of a nuclear power plant should take place in Kazakhstan, the more so as we have all the necessary conditions for this," he said.

Parts of Kazakhstan are also in seismically active zones. But officials have repeatedly issued assurances that the sparsely populated nation five times the size of France has enough space to safely accommodate a nuclear power plant.

"We hold the world's second-largest uranium reserves, and we are in front of everyone in terms of production. Therefore it is indeed Allah's will that we must deal with these

issues," Turganov said, referring to plans to build a nuclear station. "It goes without saying that there must be a thorough selection of [power plant] projects and significant attention must be paid to security."

Kazakhstan, which holds more than 15 percent of global uranium reserves, surpassed Canada as the world's largest producer of the metal in 2009. Only Australia holds more known uranium reserves in the ground.

Kazakhstan plans to produce 19,600 tons of uranium this year, up from 17,803 tons last year, and expects to raise annual production to more than 25,000 tons by 2015 by developing several joint ventures with international companies.

Kazakhstan voluntarily gave up a nuclear arsenal that it inherited after the breakup of the Soviet Union, shut down the Cold War-era Semipalatinsk nuclear test site and dismantled a nuclear reactor in Aktau near its Caspian Sea coast.

As global demand for nuclear energy has grown in recent years, state nuclear company Kazatomprom has unveiled plans to build a reactor as the culmination of plans to take its uranium through the entire nuclear fuel cycle by 2020.

Turganov declined to give more details about the reactor.

Kazatomprom operates its own uranium mines in Kazakhstan as well as several joint ventures with foreign investors such as Cameco, Areva, Toshiba and Russian state nuclear firm Rosatom.

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