

Russia Embarks on Its Global Nuclear Power Plans

by Marsha Freeman

In a series of national and international meetings in mid-March, the Russian government put forward its concrete plans to lead the global renaissance in the construction of new civilian nuclear power plants. Recent personnel changes in Rosatom, the Russian nuclear agency, are designed to position Russia as a major exporter of nuclear plants, which will help finance the construction up to 40 new domestic nuclear plants over the next 20 years. Russia's current chairmanship of the Group of 8 industrial nations positions it to lead the nuclear revival internationally.

On March 15-16, the energy ministers of the G-8 nations met in Moscow, to formulate proposals to be adopted by the G-8 heads of state, scheduled to meet in July in St. Petersburg. Two days earlier, an extraordinary meeting took place at the Kremlin, to mobilize Russia's domestic nuclear industry and establishment to meet the challenge. In addition to President Vladimir Putin and nuclear officials, the conference was attended by Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov, Security Council Secretary Igor Ivanov, and Industry and Energy Minister Viktor Khristenko.

Addressing the conference, President Putin emphasized that nuclear power engineering is "a priority [industrial] branch for the country, that makes Russia a great power; the most ambitious projects and progressive technologies are linked with this branch." Describing nuclear energy as "one of the most important national priorities" for Russia, Putin said that nuclear power is "no longer a Cinderella" or outcast.

The head of Russia's nuclear state enterprise, Rosatom, Sergei Kiriyenko, stated at the conference that funds in the Russian government's budget are insufficient to build the new nuclear reactors that Russia needs. So Russia plans to build 60 nuclear plants abroad, expecting major "markets in southeast

Asia, in order to finance its domestic program." That this can be done, he pointed out, is evidenced by the fact that in the past, Soviet nuclear specialists built 30 reactors in other countries.

This approach has been used successfully by the Russian government to keep alive its manned space program, and prevent its most talented specialists from leaving the country. The Russian space agency has been selling services abroad, including transportation to the International Space Station, in order to preserve its critical science and industrial infrastructure, and begin new space technology programs.

As chair of the March 15-16 meeting of G-8 energy ministers, Russia presented an 11-point statement as the agenda for discussion. It states that: "A significant reduction in the gap in energy supply between developed and under-supplied, less-developed countries is a major aspect of global energy security." The statement also describes nuclear energy as "crucial for long-term environmentally sustainable diversification of energy supply."

The importance of taking this global view was stressed in an article by Academician E.P. Velikhov, president of the prestigious Kurchatov Institute nuclear research center, on March 20. If the "so-called golden billion" people of the G-8 nations isolate themselves, conflict over energy supplies among the "2 billion people in the world [who] do not have access to electricity at all," will "require military unions, fleets, etc. . . . generating international conflicts at different levels, and escalating terrorism," Velikhov warned.

"We need to give a new lease on life to nuclear power engineering that could become an important factor, capable of influencing the crisis," he wrote. Velikhov's proposal in 1985 for nations to jointly build an experimental nuclear fusion plant, will finally come to fruition, when Russia, the



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Kurchatov Institute head Academician E.P. Velikhov: "We need to give a new lease on life to nuclear power engineering."

United States, Europe, Japan, China, India, and South Korea sign the final agreement to begin construction of the reactor in St. Petersburg, in June.

Although there were statements of agreement from the United States on including nuclear energy as important in the energy supplies for the future, there was no joint statement adopted by the eight industrialized countries at the end of the two-day session. European Union Commissioner for Energy, Andris Pielbalgs, told reporters on March 16 that there is not such a clear consensus on the nuclear issue among the countries of the European Union. "A common position on nuclear is still difficult to reach, because it's still controversial," he complained.

The United Kingdom is in the process of reviewing its energy policy, he stated, France is "very strongly supportive," while "Germany is phasing out nuclear power plants." However, there are signs that the British energy policy, to be released this Summer, will call for new nuclear plants there, and on March 22, during a visit to Japan, Germany's Economics Minister, Michael Glos, reported that anti-nuclear "public opinion" is changing in Germany.

Russia Is Not Waiting

Russia has no intention of waiting until the other industrial nations approve its global nuclear development perspective to forge ahead.

One week after the G-8 meeting in Moscow, President Putin, with an entourage of nearly 1,000, including top energy officials, arrived in Beijing. During his first day of talks with China's leadership on March 21, Putin stated that Russian-Chinese energy cooperation goes beyond the oil and gas deals the two nations are signing. "This cooperation includes supply of equipment for the purposes of [the] nuclear energy sector, including our participation in developing new nuclear capacities in China," Putin said.

This was reiterated during a visit by Russian nuclear chief Sergei Kiriyenko to the two Russian-built power plants that are currently under construction at the Tianwan site in China. And on March 22, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov



Presidential Press and Information Office

Russian President Putin with Chinese President Hu Jintao. "Nuclear power is no longer a Cinderella," Putin told the G-8.

added that Russia "has very strong advantages" in the nuclear sector. China is expected to announce this year which vendor it will choose for its next block of four commercial nuclear plants, and Russia has bid on those reactors.

The nation in Asia with the second-largest nuclear power plant construction program is India. In July, the Presidents of India and the United States signed an agreement in Washington to cooperate in civilian nuclear power development. To do this, the 1954 Atomic Energy Act would have to be amended by the U.S. Congress, to make India an exception from the non-proliferation restrictions of U.S. law.

Russia is not waiting for the political wrangling that will take place in Washington over at least the next few months to be sorted out.

After India exploded its first nuclear device in 1974, the United States cut off shipments of fuel for India's two U.S.-built commercial Tarapur reactors. Taking its cue from the new U.S. openings to India, Russia decided it was now opportune to reinstate its own nuclear cooperation.

According to the March 21 edition of Pakistan's *Daily Times*, India has received the first of two 30-ton shipments of nuclear fuel pellets from Russia, which will be manufactured into fuel rods for the Tarapur reactors. The shipment, aboard a special freighter, landed in India on March 16, just hours after Russian Prime Minister Fradkov touched down in New Delhi, on a state visit. The second low-enriched uranium fuel shipment will reach India "very shortly," sources told the *Daily Times*.

It is reported that the deal for Russia to supply India with nuclear fuel was concluded last December, but because it was going to raise hackles, especially in the United States, it was kept under wraps until February. At that time, Russia notified the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Nuclear Suppliers Group of the sale.

Over the past month, Russia has also signed a nuclear cooperation agreement with Hungary, and has offered to help Vietnam build its first nuclear power plant.