China Starts Building New Nuclear Power Plant

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BEIJING (AP) — A utility company says it has started building China's first new nuclear power plant since Beijing lifted a construction moratorium imposed on the industry to review safety following Japan's Fukushima disaster.

The facility in the eastern coastal city of Rongcheng will incorporate Chinese-developed safety features and is due to start operation by the end of 2017, according to the state-owned Huaneng Shandong Shidao Bay Nuclear Power Co.

China's decision to press ahead with nuclear development runs counter to moves in other countries such as Japan and Germany, which plan to scale back or shut down their nuclear power industries.

China is the world's biggest energy consumer, and nuclear power is a key element in official efforts to curb surging demand for fossil fuels.

Beijing suspended approval of new nuclear power plants to carry out safety reviews following the Japan's 2011 earthquake and tsunami that wrecked the Fukushima plant. That caused partial meltdowns that were the world's worst nuclear disaster since the 1986 Chernobyl catastrophe.

The government said in October it would resume approving new nuclear power plants but said only a few would be allowed. It said the highest safety standards would be required and facilities would be allowed only in coastal areas.

The new plant will incorporate safety features developed at Tsinghua University in Beijing that are meant to allow it to shut down in emergencies without leaking radioactive material, the official Xinhua News Agency said, citing the operator. The company is part of China Huaneng Group, one of the country's biggest state-owned utilities.

The 3 billion yuan ($475 million) facility in Rongcheng, in Shandong province, will have a generating capacity of 200 megawatts, Xinhua said. The company said it broke ground in December and has poured a portion of the foundation.

The design has "broad prospects for commercial application" and can "meet the needs of different countries and regions," the company said, suggesting its developers might try to market the technology abroad.

Plans call for the facility to be part of a 6.6-gigawatt nuclear power complex to be built over 20 years at a cost of 100 billion yuan ($15.9 billion), Xinhua said. It said that if completed, that will be China's biggest nuclear power plant.

The government said in October it wants to generate 30 percent of China's power

from solar, wind and other renewable sources, as well as from nuclear energy, by the end of 2015. That is up from an earlier target of 15 percent from renewables plus 5 percent from nuclear by 2020.

China's 15 nuclear reactors currently in operation have 12.5 gigawatts of generating capacity and supply about 1.8 percent of its power, according to the October report on development plans. It said the world average is 14 percent.

Another 26 reactors are under construction and will add 30 gigawatts, according to the October report.

Nuclear supplies about 1.8 percent of China's total power output, below what the October report said is a global average of 14 percent.

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Huaneng Shandong Shidao Bay Nuclear Power Co. (in Chinese): www.hsnpc.com.cn

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