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Dukovany expansion in Czech Republic down to five vendors as Atmea bows out
The Atmea joint venture between Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy Industries and France's EDF will not participate in a tender to build a new reactor at the Dukovany site in the Czech Republic, a member of the Czech government-appointed team supervising the project announced Thursday.

Vladivoj Reznik, a member of the Czech government's nuclear new build committee of experts, told a Prague industry conference that Atmea had announced that it was not interested in the tender to build new nuclear capacity at power company CEZ's Dukovany nuclear plant.

Atmea's withdrawal leaves US vendor Westinghouse, Russian state nuclear company Rosatom, China General Nuclear Corp., France's EDF and the South Korean partnership of Korea Electric Power Corporation, or Kepco, and Korea Hydro & Nuclear Power still in the running as potential vendors, Reznik said. He added that Atmea, which had previously proposed its Atmea 1100 reactor design for a bid, did not give a reason why it was no longer interested in the Dukovany project.

Reznik said in an interview on the sidelines of the Czech Energy Congress that it is now nearly certain that a final tender for new capacity of up to 1,200 MW at Dukovany will be for a single unit, without the option for a further reactor, which had been included as part of the preliminary tender discussions until now.

"It is 90% certain" that the tender will just be for one unit, Reznik explained, cautioning though, that no final decision has yet been made.

The Czech government team of experts started consultations with the five remaining potential technology vendors last week with the discussions scheduled to be concluded next week when talks with EDF are completed, Reznik said.

The Czech government is expected in March to sign an agreement with utility CEZ, which is 70% state owned, making it the main investor and manager of the Dukovany expansion project. A tender for technology suppliers should be prepared by the end of this year or, at the latest, by January 2021, with the winning vendor selected by the end of 2022, Reznik said.

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[Finnish government moves to strengthen nuclear energy law](#)

The Finnish government brought a bill to parliament Thursday to amend the Nuclear Energy Act and increase security at nuclear facilities.

In a statement, the government said that as the "business environment and threat landscape evolve, legislation must keep pace with developments."

Among the changes, security officials at nuclear facilities would have more authority to fend off or bring down drones flying over facilities.

The amended law would also outline in much greater detail training requirements for security officials and regulations for the use of force.

Security officials and control room operators would also be subject to stricter medical examination.

The government did not specify drug testing in the bill, but said that the new examination guidelines "would ensure that safety-critical persons are fit to perform their duties."

If approved by parliament, the amended law would take effect April 1.

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US uranium production in 2019 falls to record low, US EIA says

US uranium production declined sharply last year, down 88% from the amount produced in 2018 to 173,875 lb U3O8, "the lowest annual production on record," the US Energy Information Administration said in a preliminary report Thursday.

Uranium output in 2018 totaled 1,447,875 lb U3O8. The second-lowest production year was 1949, at the dawn of the nuclear age, when 360,000 lb were produced, according to EIA.

EIA said preliminary fourth-quarter output totaled 38,614 lb U3O8, 20% above the 32,211 lb produced in the third quarter. That third quarter production was the lowest quarterly production since at least 1995.

US producers continued to reduce output last year due to persistently low uranium prices.

EIA said uranium was produced at five sites in the US, one more than in the third quarter of 2019, all in-situ recovery facilities in Wyoming and Nebraska: Ur-Energy's Lost Creek, Energy Fuels' Nichols Ranch, Strata Energy's Ross, as well as Cameco's Smith Ranch-Highland and Crow Butte.

EIA did not disclose how much uranium each ISR facility produced in the fourth quarter.

Canadian uranium producer Cameco in 2016 began to shut down operations at Smith Ranch-Highland and Crow Butte, saying low uranium prices made these facilities unprofitable to operate. Similarly, Ur-Energy cut production at Lost Creek as part of cost-saving measures, the company said in an August 6 statement. And Energy Fuels will end uranium production at Nichols Ranch, Energy Fuels Chief Operating Officer Paul Goranson said in a January 16 email.

US-based Energy Fuels and Ur-Energy petitioned the US government for tariffs to protect them from what they said was a flood of uranium imports, but President Donald Trump last year rejected that request. Trump this week asked for \$150 million in funding for fiscal 2021 in order for the government to buy domestic uranium in an effort to support producers.

US uranium production has sharply declined from 2014, when nearly 4.9 million lb were produced. A decline in uranium prices that began in 2011 has made domestic production unprofitable, industry sources have said.

S&P Global Platts assessed the 12-month average of uranium spot prices, based on the mean of assessed activity for U3O8 delivered over the next 12 months, at between \$24.30/lb-\$26.64/lb since March 22. The price was at \$29.60/lb on February 1, 2019.

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New York seeks to block Indian Point nuclear plant license transfer

New York Attorney General Letitia James filed a petition February 12 seeking to block the NRC from transferring the operating licenses for the Indian Point nuclear plant in New York to subsidiaries of Holtec International, contending the company is financially unable to complete the decommissioning of the units, which will shut permanently by next spring.

James contended in the petition, which requests a hearing by an NRC licensing board, that Holtec fails to possess the financial qualifications necessary to complete the project.

James said in a statement Wednesday, "It is essential that the decommissioning of Indian Point be safe, rapid, and complete. Putting the decommissioning of Indian Point in the hands of a company with no experience and uncertain financial resources is very risky."

The statement said a trust fund established to pay for facility decommissioning is insufficient. The statement said that last month Holtec published a cost estimate of \$2.3 billion for decommissioning, site restoration, and spent fuel management at Indian Point.

"However, Holtec represents that the value of the [Indian Point] trust fund as of October 2019 was 'approximately \$2.1 billion' - which the State points out is a roughly \$200 million shortfall in funding for decommissioning," according to the statement. James contended it would violate NRC rules to approve a license transfer where there is a \$200 million shortfall in the trust fund.

Subsidiary Holtec Decommissioning International would be the licensed operator and provide licensee oversight of decommissioning work and manage the decommissioning trust funds, Holtec

has said. The petition states that Holtec Decommissioning is "an entity with no nuclear decommissioning track record" and that it "ignores the likelihood that on-site contamination will exceed current volume and cost estimates and fails to recognize or account for costs associated with state-law site remediation requirements that are stricter than federal standards."

Holtec International spokesman Joseph Delmar said Wednesday that NRC "has previously determined that Holtec has the financial and technical qualifications to perform decommissioning safely, and has approved license transactions at other US nuclear power plants."

In November, Entergy and Holtec International asked NRC to approve a jointly submitted application to transfer the Indian Point operating licenses from Energy to Holtec by November 2020.

Energy had agreed in April to sell the subsidiaries that own the three Indian Point reactors - unit 1, which shut in 1974; the 1,067-MW unit 2; and the 1,080-MW unit 3 - to Holtec. Indian Point is located in Buchanan, New York.

Holtec said the sale will take effect after the license transfers are approved and Indian Point-3 shuts as planned, by April 30, 2021. Indian Point-2 is scheduled to shut by April 30, 2020. Holtec would then take ownership of the site, the nuclear decommissioning trust funds, real property and spent fuel.

US Representative Sean Patrick Maloney, also a New York Democrat, in a statement Wednesday called on the NRC to hold a public hearing before transferring the license to Holtec.

Delmar said: "Stakeholder participation is an important - and expected - part of the regulatory approval process. We look forward to an opportunity to further discuss with local officials and others Holtec's plan for the safe, efficient and prompt decommissioning of Indian Point, which can be completed decades sooner than if Entergy performed the work."

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