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RUSSIAN ATOMIC AGENCIES HOSTAGE TO OTHERS' MISTAKES. (By Igor Naumov. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, June 27, 2011. p. 4. Condensed text:) Sergei Kiriyenko, head of Rosatom [Russia's Federal Atomic Energy Agency], told Prime Minister Vladimir Putin about safety tests that have been carried out at Russian nuclear power plants. Inspections started after the accident at the Fukushima-1 Japanese nuclear power plant shattered public confidence in nuclear power [see *Current Digest*, Vol. 63, No. 11, pp. 5-6]. Given global distrust of the peaceful atom, it is important for Sergei Kiriyenko to prove the reliability of Russian power units, as well as their ability to withstand any disaster. It is also important for Rosatom to keep a portfolio of orders for decades ahead, otherwise, according to experts, the industry faces a crisis. . . .

"Of course, our stations won't experience nine-point earthquakes or tsunamis. All of our stations are located in regions with six-point seismic activity, seven points at most. That's the maximum possible. Nevertheless, we've come to the conclusion that this cannot be a mitigating circumstance," the head of Rosatom stressed.

In connection with this, a comprehensive inspection has been conducted of Russian nuclear power plants. "Each station has passed four checks. In fact, since Fukushima, we are the only ones who have done this in the world. We have invited the World Association of Nuclear Operators to conduct a peer review. They inspected eight of our 10 stations and examined our security and reliability system, and they made the assessment that they consider all the measures we are taking to be adequate and in strict compliance with not only Russian standards, but also international ones," Kiriyenko said.

He predicts that in the wake of the Fukushima-1 accident, international safety standards for nuclear power plants will be tightened. However, that will hardly affect Russia, since new designs for domestic nuclear power plants meet post-Fukushima requirements. They provide for a double protective shield that can withstand impacts from large aircraft, any explosion, earthquake or tsunami, and also include a passive heat removal system. . . .

Independent experts see political and economic components in the actions of Rosatom. According to Vladimir Sliviyak, cochairman of the Ecodefense movement, managers of state-run corporations are certainly aware of the true situation concerning Russian nuclear power plants, which is far from spectacular. In Russia, there are currently 10 nuclear power plants in operation; these include 32 units, most of which are first- and second-generation. Those units have a lot of design flaws, which is why they don't meet modern safety standards. And in the RBMK (Chernobyl type) [large-capacity channel-type reactors], these shortcomings cannot be corrected.

The most rational solution is to remove them from use, but that is hardly a possibility for the foreseeable future, Slivyak believes.

Instead, Russian authorities are doing all they can to prove to the world how exceptionally reliable and safe our nuclear power plants are. In essence, they are carrying on a long-distance dispute with opponents of peaceful nuclear energy, who have intensified their efforts following the Japanese accident. The actions of those who support so-called clean energy are threatening the future of nuclear power. As is known, after the events in Japan, Germany, Switzerland, Chile and Venezuela (the last of which had intended to cooperate with Russia) have refused to construct and operate nuclear power plants.

Experts estimate that Rosatom's total loss from broken-off foreign contracts in the aftermath of Fukushima is roughly \$20 billion. However, Russia's proven partners – China and India – as well as new ones – Turkey, Vietnam, Jordan and Armenia – have not officially cancelled their plans in the area of nuclear energy. That should be kept in mind when considering the actions of Kiriyenko, who is trying to give no reason to doubt the reliability and security of Russian nuclear power plants, Slivyak says.

At stake are billions of investment dollars and ambitious plans for the development of the domestic nuclear power industry, as well as the conquest of world markets. Readers are reminded that according to the federal program titled "Development of Russia's Nuclear Industrial Complex," the share of electricity generated at Russian nuclear power plants is expected to increase from 16% to 25% of total power output by 2025. There are plans to build 26 power units and to commission six nuclear power plants, including two floating ones. . . .

The state of the global nuclear industry is still uncertain. Any new accident could have irreversible consequences in this regard. It could be that all it takes to bring about a reassessment of the prospects of peaceful nuclear energy is a sudden prolongation or sharp cost increase in the process of eliminating the consequences of the Japanese accident. In that case, the public in more and more countries may demand that their governments abandon the peaceful atom. Under these circumstances, the Russian nuclear industry is effectively becoming hostage to the mistakes of others, and it will be virtually impossible to alter the situation. People are willing to accept as givens the environmental damage from oil spills at sea, the destruction of pipelines from explosions, the deaths of miners and other technological disasters. In short, literally everything except the threat of radiation. And that cannot be ignored.