

TOP NEWS

France to build six more nuclear reactors

Stable, reliable energy can help reduce EU's reliance on gas imports, expert says

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French President Emmanuel Macron's announcement on Thursday that France would build six more nuclear reactors following a European Union proposal to label nuclear energy as clean energy has intensified debate in the EU about the energy source.

The French decision aims to ramp up the country's long-term energy-production capacity and renovate its aging nuclear fleet at a time of soaring energy prices and concerns over energy dependence.

"The time of the nuclear renaissance has come," Macron said in a speech laying out the country's energy policy for the period up to 2050. He said the government would commission six new-generation reactors, with the first expected to be on the grid in 2035, and have the option of building eight more. He also said that France wouldn't close any of its existing reactors "unless, of course, for safety reasons".

Macron's plan also includes wind and solar power, but is heavily weighted toward nuclear, which the European Commission included last month in its controversial green taxonomy, a classification system

aimed to encourage investment in green transition.

European Commissioner for the Internal Market Thierry Breton said last month that nuclear energy had a fundamental role to play if the EU was to achieve climate neutrality. He said that investment in nuclear power totaling around 500 billion euros (\$565 billion) by 2050 will be needed to reach the goal.

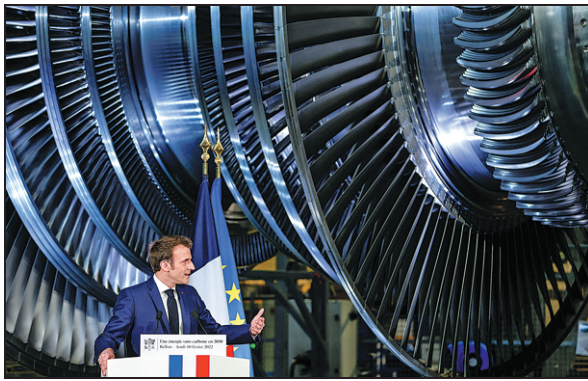
The EU now depends on nuclear energy for a quarter of its electricity, half of which is produced in France.

Yan Qin, a lead energy and carbon market analyst at Refinitiv, based in Norway, said the controversial move by the EU in the green labeling of the nuclear energy shows that it realizes that the green transition pathway needs to be steady and realistic following the energy crunch.

She described Macron's announcement of a "renaissance" as acknowledging that "ensuring energy supply security is important on the pathway to achieve climate targets".

"Nuclear power is the exemplar of stable and reliable energy to facilitate the scaling up of renewables and reduce the EU's dependence on gas imports," Qin said.

"Indeed, these changes in the EU's nuclear policy reflect the



French President Emmanuel Macron delivers a speech on Thursday at the main production site of GE Steam Power System, in Belfort, France, where he unveiled plans to build six new nuclear reactors. JEAN-FRANCOIS BADIAS / REUTERS

emphasis by China's leadership that ambitious low-carbon goals will not be realized easily and should not come at the expense of energy security."

The French and EU approach to nuclear energy has met with strong opposition from Germany.

In 2011, then German Chancellor Angela Merkel announced the phasing out of nuclear power production after the accident caused by an earthquake and tsunami at the Fukushima nuclear plant in Japan.

Germany began on Dec 31 the shut-

down of three of its six nuclear power plants as part of the phaseout plan.

New German Chancellor Olaf Scholz is sticking to Merkel's plan despite changing public opinion. A YouGov survey a month ago showed that around half of Germans said that they were in favor of reversing the nuclear shutdown due to the recent sharp rise in energy prices.

Robert Habeck, Germany's vice-chancellor and minister for economic affairs and climate action, denounced France's focus on nuclear power as "outdated".

He said that nuclear power would not turn into a competitive edge for France, and to the contrary, betting on renewables would benefit the German economy.

In a joint statement last month, Habeck and German Environment Minister Steffi Lemke rejected the EU's inclusion of nuclear energy in green taxonomy, calling it "risky and expensive".

In a letter to the EU, the German government pointed to the lack of any safety requirements regarding nuclear power plants, such as the long-term hazard to human and environment and hazard caused by radioactive waste.

In October, 10 EU countries — France, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Finland, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — issued a joint statement calling for the EU to recognize nuclear power as a low-carbon energy source in the bloc's transition to climate neutrality.

On Jan 27, five former Japanese prime ministers — Junichiro Koizumi, Morihiro Hosokawa, Naoto Kan, Yukio Hatoyama and Tomiichi Murayama — wrote a letter to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, calling on the bloc not to develop nuclear energy.

The policy advocating nuclear energy "threatens the survival and existence of future generations", they said.

IPR: Misuse can damage country's interests too

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protection of both mascots.

It stipulated that no individual or department could use the images or names of the mascots for private reasons, nor distort or tamper with them in any other fashion. It added that using the images in anything other than the official designs was also prohibited.

"In other words, people were told what they could do and couldn't do well before the Games. They knew they would have to go to licensed online or physical shops to buy Games-related merchandise," Sun said. "That's why we rarely see counterfeit Bing Dwen Dwens on the market, or the abuse of Olympic symbols on other goods."

So far, 63 Olympic symbols, 14 patents and 315 trademarks submitted by the organizing committee have been placed under all-encompassing protection, according to the administration.

Sun said individuals and retailers should strictly abide by the Regulations on the Protection of Olympic Symbols, "as misuse may not only infringe on the IPR, but also damage the country's interests".

In October, the administration launched a campaign on protecting Olympic symbols, increasing inspections of markets and e-commerce platforms. The campaign will continue until the end of June.

In a case disclosed on Monday, a retailer nicknamed Ren was sentenced to one year in prison and fined 40,000 yuan (\$6,290) for selling counterfeit Winter Olympics mascots. It was the country's first criminal case involving harm to the copyright of the mascots.

Reviews of trademark and patent applications involving the Beijing 2022 Winter Games have also been strengthened to prevent Olympic symbols and the names of athletes from being misused.

As of Monday, the administration had rejected 429 trademark applications involving Bing Dwen Dwen and freestyle skier Gu Ailing, announcing that 43 trademarks had also been invalidated.

Kang Lixia, an IPR lawyer at the Beijing Xuanfa Law Firm, said that the timely campaign, harsh punishments and strict reviews have contributed to keeping the Games running smoothly. "The strong protection of Olympic symbols and countermeasures against IPR violators have also shown that China is on its way to being an IPR power, which will help us build a good global reputation and encourage innovators," she added.

Relations: Future offers partnership opportunities

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agreements are a big advantage for Belgian companies in China. The Belgian Economic Mission to China in 2019, headed by Princess Astrid, was the largest trade mission in Belgian history, with more than 600 participants and perhaps the best example of the strong economic ties between the two countries.

In this regard, there are numerous business opportunities for Belgian companies in different sectors, such as environmental technologies. China has reiterated its commitment to become carbon neutral by 2060, focusing its efforts on future-oriented solutions to make its cities and industries more environmentally friendly by reducing pollution and reforming the energy market. Belgian technology companies are among the world leaders in the clean-tech sector, and there are many areas in which they can help China achieve its environmental goals.

Looking at the future of Belgian-Chinese relations, the two countries will continue to work together to expand mutual openness by sharing their business opportunities with local networks. It is hoped that they will continue to cooperate to tackle today's global economic and political issues together.

There will be opportunities for partnerships, including trilateral cooperation involving China, Belgium and developing countries participating in the Belt and Road Initiative.

In today's interconnected world, the Belgian-Chinese Chamber of Commerce can play a useful role: It provides full, detailed and trusted information through websites, webinars, conferences and newsletters to entrepreneurs and partners, organizes networking activities to help businesses develop, and helps companies to discover new opportunities in Belgium and China.

We are now in the Year of the Tiger, a symbol of strength and bravery. I sincerely hope that Belgium and China will continue to develop cooperation in scientific, economic, cultural and educational fields, among others, and overcome international political tensions. The Belgian-Chinese Chamber of Commerce will remain a bridge between Belgium and China.

The author is a lawyer, a member of the Brussels Bar and chairman of the Belgian-Chinese Chamber of Commerce. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Clashes in Jerusalem



Jewish settlers and Palestinians clash in the flashpoint Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, East Jerusalem, on Sunday. Violence erupted after a visit by a controversial Israeli lawmaker to Sheikh Jarrah to show support for Jewish residents of the neighborhood. AMMAR AWAD / REUTERS

Polls indicate close ROK presidential election

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The front-runners in the Republic of Korea's election to replace outgoing President Moon Jae-in were neck and neck in the opinion polls as a total of four candidates were registered on Sunday, with the official campaign period set to kick off on Tuesday.

With polling day on March 9, the latest Realmeter poll published on Sunday indicated that Yoon Suk-yeol from the opposition People Power Party held a narrow lead over the ruling Democratic Party's Lee Jae-myung, while other polls showed results swinging between the two.

According to the survey, Yoon garnered 41.6 percent of support to Lee's 39.1 percent.

The two other candidates: the People Party's Ahn Cheol-soo, a former medical doctor and entrepreneur who finished third behind Moon in the 2017 election; and Sim Sang-jung, a labor activist from the liberal Justice Party, who is also the sole female candidate, have single-digit ratings in the polls.

"From media coverage and public opinion polls it is very likely

that either Yoon or Lee will become the next president of ROK, but it is unclear who will win the race," said Yu Qiang, a professor at the University of International Relations in Beijing, adding that whoever wins will not only matter to the country, but also will shape the future of Seoul's relations with Pyongyang, Beijing, Washington and Tokyo.

During their second TV debate held on Friday, Yoon and Lee spent most of the time engaging in verbal attacks over corruption allegations instead of serious discussions of policy issues.

Yoon accused Lee of involvement in corruption in land development projects and Seongnam FC soccer club based in Seongnam, Gyeonggi Province, where Lee used to serve as mayor. Lee fought back by mentioning Yoon's wife Kim Keon-hee, raising questions about her alleged involvement in a stock manipulation case related to Deutscher Motors, a BMW car dealer.

As a result, the chair of the debate had to step in at one moment to force them back to the topic of youth policy.

After the debate, an editorial in the Korea Herald commented that,



Yoon wants to establish a trilateral diplomatic office between ROK, DPRK and the US and said he is open to signing a peace treaty and granting economic assistance if the DPRK denuclearizes first. Lee, as Moon's successor, would like to continue supporting diffuse reciprocity — engaging with the DPRK, even in the absence of a change in its behavior."

Yu Qiang, a professor at the University of International Relations in Beijing

whichever of the top two candidates is elected, people in the ROK "would be forced to live with a new leader facing a slew of corruption allegations and family-related scandals in the next five years".

Wang Chong, a distinguished professor at Zhejiang International Studies University and a senior researcher at the Charhar Institute, a foreign relations think tank, said Lee and Yoon proposed contrasting approaches on many issues.

According to Wang, the two have different perceptions of whether to prioritize Seoul's security ties with the United States or its economic ties with China.

"Of course they both support a strong US-ROK alliance, but they differ in terms of degree," Wang said, adding that Yoon is a pro-US politician who had proposed additional deployments as part of the US Terminal High Altitude Area Defense anti-ballistic missile defense system.

"Lee on the other hand, wants to maintain an equidistant policy between the United States and China, knowing that a worsening Beijing-Seoul relationship will only deepen domestic chasms like income inequality and youth

unemployment," Wang added.

Yu said that although the two candidates both support dialogue and economic cooperation with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, they differ on how they would approach the issue.

"Yoon wants to establish a trilateral diplomatic office between ROK, DPRK and the US and said he is open to signing a peace treaty and granting economic assistance if the DPRK denuclearizes first. Lee, as Moon's successor, would like to continue supporting diffuse reciprocity — engaging with the DPRK, even in the absence of a change in its behavior," Yu said.

According to Yu, Lee sees Seoul's role as a mediator between the US and the DPRK.

As for Tokyo's role, Park Jung-jin, a professor of international relations at Tsuda University in Tokyo, told local media that "Whether Lee or Yoon wins the race, it will be an opportunity for Seoul and Tokyo to reset ties."

Park said that Yoon, who is known for his pro-US policy, would approach the Japanese government "more proactively than Lee".

"But I find it hard to be optimistic about the outlook for bilateral relations, at least in the near term, given that the comfort women and wartime labor issues have become so politicized in the two countries," Park said.