

Thorium Another sign it is the coming nuclear fuel 11/27/2011



Australia and the Czech Republic are going to co-operate on building a prototype thorium-fuelled molten salt reactor. This despite the fact that thorium mining is banned in Australia (in some states even exploration for it is outlawed) and, when it is extracted as part of rare earth mining, then the thorium has to be put back in the ground. Needless to say, the reactor is being built in the Czech Republic and the Australian partner is a private company, not a government agency.

And yet!

While the Federal government policy is against thorium, a thorium conference has been staged over two days in the Federal Parliament building in Canberra and was addressed by none other than the Federal Resources and Energy Minister Martin Ferguson. Ferguson is one of the more open-minded members of the left-wing Labor administration when it comes to the whole uranium-nuclear debate. The minister, who was a trade union boss before entering parliament, opened the “Thorium - A Base Load Power Source” symposium in Canberra by pointing out that nuclear power is prohibited under Australian law. He went on to toe the party line by saying that, while nuclear power in Australia was not needed in the present energy mix, he welcomed the debate on nuclear power. Then he added a telling sentence: “The arguments in support of nuclear power are in many ways strengthened if that power were to be derived from thorium as against uranium”. He also said he recognised the potential for thorium in “the long term”. It is fair to say that Ferguson has been leading the way in the government for uranium mining, and his speech will be seen as encouraging those who are pushing the thorium cause.

Furthermore, it is understood that the Department of Resources and Energy is undertaking a major study of Australia’s energy capacity and this includes a re-examination of the potential of thorium. Although no systematic exploration and assessment has been carried out, it has been accepted for several years that Australia has the largest thorium resource in the world.

Among those attending the symposium were senior people from the Federal government’s Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organization (ANSTO). CEO

Adi Patterson described thorium power as “very important and probably essential”, but he urged its proponents to work with the uranium industry and not in competition with it.

Another at the symposium was Dr Miloslav Hron, chief scientist with the Czech Republic’s Nuclear Research Institute. He told the meeting that there was no a race on to develop thorium technology, particularly since the Fukushima crisis. He said Russia and the U.S. were accelerating their thorium efforts, and research was being carried out in Norway, France, Japan, India and China.

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