

## **M'sia aims to have nuclear power plant by 2021**

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Malaysia announced Tuesday it aims to build its first nuclear power plant by 2021, saying it is the only solution to the country's growing energy needs.

"The cabinet has approved in principle. Yes, we are going nuclear. For our ministry, the countdown has begun," said Peter Chin, minister for energy, green technology and water.

"We need a lead time of 10 years. (In) 2021 we could have our first plant hopefully," he told reporters.

Chin said the nuclear option was the solution to Malaysia's energy needs, and indicated the government was not keen to debate with critics, saying the priority was to reassure those living in the vicinity of the eventual site.

"No point engaging (with all stakeholders). Only when the site is identified we will engage those affected. There must be a sincere debate on energy security," he said.

State energy firm Tenaga has said it could construct the country's first 1,000 megawatt nuclear power plant at a cost of 3.1 billion dollars.

The government asked it to look at the option amid surging global oil prices and in view of the country's limited supply of oil and natural gas.

Currently, half of Malaysia's power plants run on gas, and the rest on coal and hydropower. Chin described Malaysia's existing energy mix as "unhealthy".

"Energy demand keeps increasing. Going into the future is to go nuclear. That is the only viable option," he said.

Chin said Malaysia was looking at South Korea, France, Japan and China as possible technology providers for the plant.

He said the government was identifying possible sites, and the plant would be in a region where power demand was high. "We have a few sites in mind," he said, but declined to elaborate.

The minister said electricity usage in Malaysia was currently 14,000 megawatts while total capacity is 23,000 MW.

"By 2017, we would have hit critical levels," Chin said. "It is a very costly exercise. We have no choice."

- AFP

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