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SAFETY FEATURES STRESSED AT FIRST NUCLEAR PLANT, CUBANS SAY
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CIENFUEGOS, CUBA, SEPT 13, REUTER - A TOP ENGINEER AT THE CONSTRUCTION SITE OF CUBA'S FIRST NUCLEAR POWER PLANT TOLD VISITING JOURNALISTS THAT THE FACILITY WAS BEING BUILT SO AS TO PREVENT THE ESCAPE OF RADIOACTIVE SUBSTANCES INTO THE ATMOSPHERE OR SEA IN THE EVENT OF AN EARTHQUAKE, TIDAL WAVE, PLANE CRASH OR TECHNOLOGICAL MISHAP.

THE ENGINEER, PEDRO GONZALES, SAID THAT SAFETY FEATURES HAVE BEEN ADDED TO THE ORIGINAL SOVIET DESIGN AND THAT THE PROJECT HAS BEEN APPROVED BY THE INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY IN VIENNA.

THE THIRTY-TWO YEAR OLD CUBAN ENGINEER SAID THAT THE CYLINDRICAL BUILDINGS HOUSING THE REACTORS WILL BE TOPPED BY CONTAINMENT DUMES, DESIGNED TO WITHSTAND THE CRASH OF PLANE, WHICH WILL PREVENT THE ESCAPE OF RADIOACTIVITY INTO THE ATMOSPHERE IN CASE OF AN ACCIDENT AS OCCURRED AT CHERNOBYL.

THE ENGINEER REVEALED FOR THE FIRST TIME HOW CUBA HOPES TO DISPOSE OF THE RADIOACTIVE WASTE. HE SAID THAT AFTER CONSIDERING SEVERAL OPTIONS IT WAS DECIDED TO MIX THE WASTE WITH ASPHALTIC MATERIALS +AND DEPOSIT THE BLOCKS IN SPECIAL PLACES. +

THE PLANT IS BEING BUILT NEAR THE MOUTH OF CIENFUEGOS BAY ON THE CARIBBEAN SEA ON THE SOUTH COAST OF CUBA.

THE FIRST OF THE TWO SOVIET-BUILT REACTORS, WHICH WILL EACH BE USED TO GENERATE 417 MEGAWATTS OF ELECTRICITY, ARE SCHEDULED TO BEGIN OPERATION AT THE END OF 1990. TWO OTHER REACTORS WITH THE SAME CAPACITY SHOULD BE COMPLETED AROUND THE TURN OF THE CENTURY. CUBA'S TOTAL ELECTRICAL POWER OUTPUT IN 1959, WHEN THE CUBA REVOLUTION TRIUMPHED, WAS LESS THAN 400 MW.

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TRIPLE SAFETY BACK-UP FEATURES HAVE BEEN INCORPORATED INTO THE TECHNOLOGICAL DESIGN +SO THAT IF ONE ELEMENT FAILS, OTHERS WILL TAKE ITS PLACE,+ GONZALEZ SAID.

HE TOLD THE JOURNALISTS THAT THE SURROUNDING FLORA, FAUNA, EARTH AND WATER WITHIN A RADIUS OF SEVERAL MILES, WILL BE MONITORED REGULARLY TO DETECT EVEN THE SLIGHTEST INCREASES IN RADIOACTIVITY. HE SAID THAT WORK IS ALREADY IN PROGRESS AT A LABORATORY NEAR THE REACTORS TO STUDY THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE AREA SO THAT THERE WILL BE ABUNDANT DATA AVAILABLE FOR COMPARITIVE STUDIES IN THE FUTURE.

WATER FROM THE REACTOR WILL BE TREATED AT A SPECIAL FILTERING PLANT TO REMOVE ANY TRACES OF RADIOACTIVITY BEFORE IT RUNS INTO THE SEA. RAINWATER WILL BE CAUGHT IN LARGE RECTANGULAR POOLS NEAR THE REACTORS TO BE PURIFIED AT THE TREATMENT PLANT.

CIENFUEGOS BAY IS RENOWNED FOR ITS RICH SHRIMP SPANNING GROUNDS. A RECENT OIL SPILL FROM A CUBAN SHIP OFF THE COAST ALARMED FISHERMEN AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND IT WAS ANNOUNCED THAT CUBAN PRESIDENT FIDEL CASTRO REAFFIRMED PREVIOUS DIRECTIVES FOR AIMED AT PREVENTING THE BAY FROM BECOMING CONTAMINATED.

GONZALEZ SAID THAT +THE HUMAN FACTOR IS DECISIVE+ AND THAT NUMEROUS ENGINEERS AND OTHER SPECIALISTS IN NUCLEAR ENERGY BEGAN TRAINING TO TAKE OVER THE OPERATION OF NUCLEAR PLANT PRIOR TO 1980. HE SAID THAT IN MOST CASES PREPARATIONS INCLUDED GAINING PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE AT SIMILAR NUCLEAR ENERGY PLANTS IN THE SOVIET UNION, BULGARIA OR ANOTHER EASTERN BLOC NATION. HE SAID THAT SOME CUBANS HAD ALSO TAKEN COURSES OFFERED BY THE INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY.

CONSTRUCTION ON THE MAJOR EDIFICATIONS OF THE POWER PLANT BEGAN TWO YEARS AGO. GONZALEZ SAID THAT THE TOTAL COST OF THE PLANT IS APPROXIMATELY 2.4 BILLION DOLLARS. HE ADDED, +A POOR NATION LIKE OURS COULD NEVER HAVE UNDERTAKEN SUCH A GIGANTIC PROJECT WITHOUT THE FRATERNAL HELP OF THE SOVIET UNION.+ HE SAID THAT CUBA NEEDS NUCLEAR ENERGY FOR ITS DEVELOPMENT BECAUSE IT HAS LIMITED OIL RESERVES, NO COAL AND NO SIZABLE RIVERS.

--REUTER/LEM

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