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Taiwanese reactor enters retirement

14 March 2023

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Unit 2 of Taiwan's Kuosheng nuclear power plant has been taken offline and will be decommissioned following the expiry of its 40-year operating licence, in accordance with Taiwan's nuclear phase-out policy.

The two-unit Kuosheng plant in northern Taiwan (Image: Taipower)

Construction of Kuosheng 2 began in March 1976 and the 985 MWe boiling water reactor (BWR) entered commercial operation in March 1983.

"Some people concerned are worried that Taiwan will lack electricity in the future," Taiwan Power Company (Taipower) said. "Taipower has made long-term plans in terms of power supply development and power grid construction. In terms of power supply development, we are actively promoting gas-fired power generation units that halve carbon emissions. At present, gas-fired power generation projects such as Datan, Xingda, Taichung, Tongxiao Phase II, and Dalin have been launched simultaneously. For existing units, Taipower adjusted its annual repair plan and shortened the time in response to extreme weather; the power grid has also continued to be strengthened, and a total of TWD100.9 billion (USD3.3 billion) has been invested in the improvement of power distribution equipment in the past five years".

Taipower noted that later this year the new Tongxiao and Datan No.8 coal-powered units will be brought online, with a total capacity of 1.3 GWe. "The total installed capacity is greater than the 985,000 kWh of the shutdown No.2 nuclear power unit," it said.

Phase-out policy

Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was elected to government in January 2016 with a policy of creating a "nuclear-free homeland" by 2025. Under this policy, Taiwan's six operable power reactors would be decommissioned as their 40-year operating licences expire. Shortly after taking office, the DPP government passed an amendment to the Electricity Act, passing its phase-out policy into law. The government aims for an energy mix of 20% from renewable sources, 50% from liquefied natural gas and 30% from coal.

However, in a referendum held in November 2018, voters chose to abolish that amendment. The Ministry of Economic Affairs said the amendment was officially removed from the Electricity Industry Act on 2 December.

Nevertheless, Minister of Economic Affairs Shen Jong-chin said in January 2019 "there would be no extension or restarts of nuclear power plants in Taiwan due to subjective and objective conditions, as well as strong public objection".

Unit 1 of Taiwan's oldest plant, Chinshan, was taken offline in December 2018, followed by Chinshan 2 in July 2019.

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The 40-year operating licence for Kuosheng 1 - also a 985 MWe BWR - was due to expire on 27 December 2021, when it was due to be shut down. However, in May of that year, Taipower announced it would only be able to operate the reactor until June owing to a lack of storage in the unit's used fuel pool.

The unit's decommissioning plan included the construction of a dry storage facility for used fuel. However, construction of the facility has been delayed by a dispute between Taipower and the New Taipei City government, which is opposed to a permanent used fuel storage facility within its jurisdiction.

Taiwan now has two operable nuclear power reactors at the Maanshan plant, both 936 MWe pressurised water reactors, whose operating licences expire on 27 July 2024 and 17 May 2025, respectively. In July 2021, Taipower submitted an application to the Atomic Energy Council to shut down the two-unit Maanshan nuclear power plant. According to existing legislation, the utility must file an application to decommission the units at least three years prior to energy production stopping.

Construction of two units at Lungmen began in 1999, but the project has been beset with political, legal and regulatory delays. The completed unit 1 was mothballed in July 2015, while construction of unit 2 was suspended in April 2014.

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