

Kazakhstan Stockpiles Uranium for a Century

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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ALMATY, Kazakhstan — Kazakhstan plans to cement its place as the world's largest uranium producer by increasing output and boosting reserves by 50 percent, enough to last for more than a century, the head of the state nuclear company said.

Vladimir Shkolnik, a former energy minister who now heads Kazatomprom, said Kazakhstan would increase its uranium reserves to as much as 2.5 million tons. Kazatomprom data show current reserves at 1.7 million tons.

"This means our reserves will be enough for more than 100 years, even given the higher output scenario," Shkolnik said in an interview. He declined to specify when reserves would reach this new level.

Kazakhstan, which holds more than 15 percent of global uranium reserves, produced 17,803 tons of the metal in 2010 after surpassing Canada a year earlier as the world's largest

producer. This year, it plans to raise output to 19,600 tons.

Shkolnik said Kazakhstan planned to raise output further.

"We are now approaching the output plateau, which we had anyway forecast in our long-term program. It will be in the neighborhood of 20,000 tons, maybe 25,000 tons," he said, referring to annual uranium production.

Shkolnik, who has also served as industry minister, said Kazakhstan's plans to produce more uranium had not been affected by Japan's nuclear crisis. Damage to the Fukushima Daiichi plant caused by the March 11 earthquake and tsunami in Japan has stirred fears that worldwide uranium demand could fall.

"Our supplies to those reactors which have now been halted — six blocks of the Fukushima station — comprise around 400 tons [in uranium equivalent], which is 2 percent of 20,000 tons," he said.

"But the company has another 12 blocks that are operational, so this will have no effect, or impact will be minimal."

He added, "The countries which have nuclear reactors, or those planning to build them ... have not announced that they will stop their nuclear programs."

Shkolnik replaced Mukhtar Dzhakishev last year as head of Kazatomprom after his predecessor was jailed for 14 years on corruption and embezzlement charges, a case that alarmed foreign investors working in the former Soviet republic.

Kazatomprom operates its own uranium mines in Kazakhstan as well as several joint ventures with foreign investors, including Cameco, Areva, Toshiba and Russian state nuclear company Rosatom.

Shkolnik said demand for uranium was set to rise sharply in China and that Kazakhstan had every chance of becoming the largest supplier of uranium to its giant neighbor.

He said that, by 2030, China would be operating 150 nuclear reactors.

"Multiply this by 20 tons and you get 3,000 tons of fuel, which means they will need 30,000 tons of uranium a year," Shkolnik said.

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