

## **PBMR cuts wil cost SA nuclear edge, union warns**

Written by Sapa

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Government's decision to "pull the plug" on the pebble bed modular reactor (PBMR) project by slashing its funding will cost South Africa the lead it has in this area of nuclear research, trade union UASA warned on Monday. "By pulling the plug on [the] PBMR project, government may be about to pour more than R7,2 billion down the drain, together with a ten-year lead in a technology that is becoming increasingly desired in other countries," UASA sector manager Willie van Eeden said in a statement.

In the recently-announced 2010/11 Budget, spending on the project had been slashed -- from over R1 billion a year, to 11.4 million in the current financial year.

"The monumental damage that is done to South Africa's nuclear research was clearly driven home at the International Conference on Access to Civil Nuclear Energy held in Paris recently.

"Mr Luís Echavarri, director-general of the Nuclear Energy Agency, forecast that fourth-generation nuclear reactors would not be available in the marketplace for 20 or 30 years, and would not be operating commercially for another ten years after that. "Although delayed, South Africa's PBMR would have been ready much earlier," Van Eeden said. But instead of making use of this opportunity to be at the forefront of international nuclear research, state funding for the PBMR had been "savagely cut".

Although a final decision on the future of the PBMR was expected in August, the funding cut "in effect already amounts to a final decision". Not even the fact that South Africa was acknowledged internationally as a world leader in PBMR technology had stopped the government.

Van Eeden said up to 800 highly-skilled staff at the PBMR company looked set to lose their jobs. "South Africa will lose a magnitude of high-level nuclear skills if government does not reconsider its assistance to the PBMR project. "This would have a serious adverse effect on the new technology civil nuclear capabilities for this country," he warned. No response was received to questions sent to PBMR (Pty) Ltd two weeks ago by Sapa querying, among other things, the future of the project.