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THE WORLD OF NUCLEAR

MARINE INDUSTRY LEADING NUCLEAR IN TRANSPORTATION

DR STUART BALLANTYNE & PROF STEPHEN WILSON

A GREEN LIGHT FOR PBMR - A SOUTH AFRICAN SUCCESS STORY?

AND MORE.....





N²A HIGHLIGHTS

Image: The well known Jacaranda flowers, Jacaranda tree found in South Africa

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FROM THE EDITOR

As 2026 draws closer, Africa's energy landscape is undergoing a profound shift. Nuclear power is no longer a distant aspiration; it has become a central pillar in conversations about sustainability, economic growth, and long-term energy security.

With South Africa's IRP2025 formally implementing nuclear into the baseload energy mix, the continent is preparing for a future in which nuclear technologies play a decisive role.

In this November edition of N²A, we explore key developments shaping that future. Khensani Blondie Matshata expands the conversation with her article on nuclear energy as a key player in Africa's energy ambitions and hydrogen production. As hydrogen continues to be a talking point, nuclear energy provides the reliable, clean power required to position Africa as a competitive producer.

Meanwhile, Dr Stuart Ballantyne and Prof Stephen Wilson highlight how the marine industry is leading nuclear power in the transport space, revealing advancements in maritime propulsion that have significant implications for African trade and coastal development.

I also expand on the "re-activation" of the government's PBMR development. A positive look at South Africa's PBMR revival, highlighting skills development, job creation, and its potential to become a truly Proudly South African project.

Across all these perspectives, one theme stands out clearly: the urgent need for nuclear education. As technologies evolve and adoption accelerates, informed professionals, policymakers, educators, and engaged citizens are essential.

Heather Veldhuis
HEATHER VELDHUIS
EDITOR



At N²A, we are proud to play a leading role in supporting this knowledge shift, providing credible information to specialists and the general public alike.

Enjoy the November edition as we continue shaping the conversation around Africa's nuclear future.



The Jacaranda, introduced to South Africa from South America in the late 1800s, symbolises renewal with its vivid purple bloom. Pretoria is famously known as the "Jacaranda City", and some of the oldest trees are over a century old. Like nuclear power, the Jacaranda reflects longevity, resilience, and the quiet ability to transform landscapes for generations.

MARINE INDUSTRY LEADING NUCLEAR IN TRANSPORTATION

DR STUART BALLANTYNE & PROF STEPHEN WILSON

Hagar, I can't get to sleep for thinking about her...!' declared Lucky Eddie to his Commander. 'I can't even concentrate, eat, or do anything without thinking about her.'

Hagar put a hand around Eddie's shoulder sympathetically. 'It's alright, Eddie, I was the same with my first boat!'

Hagar the Horrible, a nautical mentor to millions, has dispersed so many gems of wisdom.



Along with 274,000 other Queenslanders who own boats, we proudly show photos of our boats, while our spouses show off happy snaps of the kids. Boat owners can turn ugly in looks or personality, as time passes, but a good-looking boat always stays a good-looking boat!

The amazing thing about a boat is that it can be moved easily with very little horsepower. There is a photo, from 1930, showing a draft horse pulling 600 tons of coal on a 200-ton barge. In comparison, pulling that 800-ton weight on railway wheels or truck wheels would require 30 to 40 horses.

This sort of efficiency indicates why floating solutions were proposed in 1950 when US President Dwight D Eisenhower asked for ideas for his 'Atoms for Peace Project',

In 1954, when the first 5-MW nuclear power station in the Soviet Union went into operation at Obninskoye, Russian engineers highlighted the attractiveness of nuclear power for ship propulsion, where 'great range and endurance with the least amount of fuel weight' were the most desirable features. Seventy years later, they still are!

The first US marine nuclear project was the nuclear submarine USS Nautilus, commissioned in 1954. It could stay underwater, even under the polar icecap, for extended periods. In 1959, the first US nuclear cargo-passenger ship, Savannah, was launched, entering service in 1964.

It was capable of circumnavigating the planet 14 times at 20 knots, on just 22 kg of uranium. That volume of uranium is less than a 2-litre milk bottle.

Meanwhile, in December 1957, the Russians launched the 134m passenger-cargo icebreaker Lenin, pipping the Americans by getting her into service by 1959.

These commercial nuclear vessels were demonstrating significantly higher operational capabilities, particularly on the Russian Trans-Arctic route, the Northeast Passage, which gave the Russians access to significant oil reserves, gas reserves, and mineral resources.

In January 2022, multinational engineering and construction company China Communications and Construction, and Russian Titanium Resources agreed to cooperate on a mining project in north Russia, to develop a mining and metallurgical complex for the processing of titanium ores and quartz sands, from the Pizhemsky deposit in the Komi Republic. **CONTINUED ON PG 05**

CONT.... FROM PG 4

This Arctic-region project involves the construction of the Sosnogorsk-Indiga railway and the deep-sea ports of Tiksi and Indiga. These developments have been boosted by the Ukraine war and sanctions against Russia, resulting in a 35% increase in Chinese trade. These developments need reliable waterways, which only icebreakers can provide.

Russia is boosting its 40-strong ice-breaking fleet, with all of the new vessels being nuclear-powered. Russian shipbuilder Rosatomflot has recently signed a contract for the construction of a unique multifunctional nuclear service vessel that would operate from 2029. The vessel is designed to perform a full range of work on recharging nuclear icebreakers.

A successful Russian Floating Nuclear Power Plant (FNPP), the Akademik Lomonosov, has been working since 2018 in the port of Pevek in far eastern Russia. China is developing FNPPs for use in offshore drilling and military use, and as of April 2024, they are building another 23 reactors in China.

Several countries are designing 5 to 10 MW Micro Modular Reactors (MMRs). For context, these MMRs are designed to fit on a 12 m semi-trailer, and can power merchant ships up to Panamax size, which need around 9 MW.

The largest production wind turbines are only around 7 MW, with a capital cost of US \$ 1.2 M per MW, and a significant footprint, with a limited lifespan of 20-30 years. Check for yourself!

In the marine industry, not having to carry liquid fuel or do voyage deviations to bunkers for refilling is economically highly desirable. Nuclear-powered vessels have been sailing the oceans for the last 70 years, so the shipping industry offers an ideal target market for MMRs.

Currently, the oceans carry over 100,000 cargo ships of all sizes, each carrying 1000 to 4000 tons of fuel, so just imagine the financial implications, over a 30-year ship lifespan, of replacing this amount of fuel with cargo. Add to that, the reduction in maintenance costs and manning associated with large diesel engines.

CONTINUED ON PG 06

Dr Stuart Ballantyne is a Naval Architect who studied Naval Architecture in Glasgow, and is a Fellow of the Royal Institution of Naval Architects. He holds a Doctorate in Science from Strathclyde University. He has real sea experience and was a Deck Officer in the Merchant Navy for seven years, in both passenger and cargo ships. Dr Ballantyne started the Sea Transport Corporation in 1976, which has sold ship designs into 47 countries, owns and operates three commercial vessels, and has built two ports. He is the Winner of ten International Awards for services to the marine industry, including five Environmental Awards. He has published three books, with all proceeds going to the Seamen's Mission. He is also the recipient of the Vellum Award for Bravery of the Royal Humane Society.



The Russian nuclear-powered Sevmorput has sailed to Antarctica, carrying construction materials destined for the Vostok research station.



Prof Stephen Wilson is an Adjunct Professor in the School of Mechanical and Mining Engineering at the University of Queensland. In addition, as MD of Cape Otway Associates, he provided energy industry and market analysis in most parts of the wider energy sector along the value chain, from primary energy to end users.

Stephen is an engineer and an energy economist, with 30 years' experience on assignments in over 30 countries. For the past four years, he has been involved in academia, in research and teaching, and his primary focus is on the commercialisation of new technology and startup ventures. Stephen is the lead author of the 2021 report, "What would be required for nuclear energy plants to be operating in Australia from 2030."

Add the bonus political attraction of zero emissions with MMRs, and the nuclear approach becomes compelling. Ship owners have wasted the last two decades and significant money, flirting with exotic propulsion ideas based on ammonia, hydrogen, sail-assisted, methanol, LNG, only to discover that nothing comes close to the energy density of nuclear propulsion!



Image Credit: San Francisco Maritime National Park Association

NS Savannah was the world's first nuclear-powered cargo-passenger ship. Designed by George G. Sharp, Inc. as a US government project to promote the peaceful use of atomic energy, the vessel was built at Camden, New Jersey, between 1958 and 1962. On completion, NS Savannah displaced 22,000 tons and could carry 9400 tons of cargo and 60 passengers.

The existing 162 nuclear vessels in the world have been restricted to military, research, and icebreaking duties. They will soon have their numbers boosted with cargo ships. China is already leading the charge with a nuclear container ship.

A boat that doesn't need refuelling has a lot of appeal, especially if you can plug it into the power grid when alongside, and deliver power to the city instead of drawing from it.

Hagar the Horrible and his Director of Operations, Lucky Eddie, would certainly agree!



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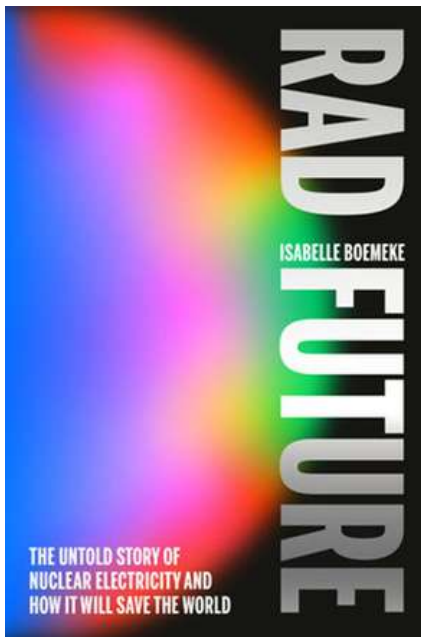
- France - Nuclear Waste Repository
- Rwanda - Lake Kivu Biogas Power Station - 56MWe
- South Africa and Australia - New Nuclear Pebble Bed Power

FUN BOOK ABOUT NUCLEAR POWER

Isabelle Boemeke is a well-known Brazilian fashion model, and generally, one would imagine, not at all the type of person to be involved with nuclear power. In fact, if one ever does come across fashion-model types being associated with nuclear it is usually marching in the streets with a placard opposing nuclear, for any number of silly reasons.

But interestingly, she is a pro-nuclear influencer. In her nuclear role she is known by the social media persona name of Isodope.

She has recently produced her first book promoting nuclear power called RAD FUTURE



Rad Future: The Untold Story of Nuclear Electricity and How It Will Save the World by Isabelle Boemeke

Isabelle appears on fashion ramps, but has also given pro-nuclear speeches, and has been to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna. She exposes how decades of fearmongering, a few dramatic (but preventable) disasters, and relentless bad PR have convinced the world that nuclear is dangerous when it's actually the key to an affordable, sustainable future.

Isabelle has now written her first book, on nuclear power.



She produced RAD FUTURE, a book promoting nuclear power. The mere fact that she wrote a book says a lot. It means that she actually did the work required. So many anti-nuclear activists will chant and shout in the streets but will certainly not do any real work to study the subject. **CONTINUED ON PG 08**



Isabelle with Hollywood actress Gwyneth Paltrow. Gwyneth hosted a promotional event for Isabelle's book promoting nuclear power.

CONT.... FROM PG 07

In her book, she points out that we have dropped the ball on the cleanest, most powerful energy source we have, and it's time to fix that. This is not a boring science book; it is a mix of humour, sass, and deep research. This makes RAD FUTURE a wild ride through the science, history, and future of nuclear electricity. From Cold War politics to Hollywood-fuelled paranoia to cutting-edge reactor designs, she details exactly how nuclear works, and why it's our best shot at creating a future of radical abundance for all.

Rad Future will leave you feeling stoked about what's possible.

In *Rad Future*, Isabelle shatters the fear and misinformation surrounding nuclear and shows how the actual science tells a different story from the anti-nuke chanting. It turns out that nuclear-generated electricity is our best option for ensuring the future of the planet. Nuclear can power cities, desalinate water, power industry directly, and all with the smallest environmental footprint of any energy source.

Contrary to speculation online, Isabelle does not work for the nuclear industry, as anti-nukes always seem to claim, the moment they discover a nuclear supporter. She does say, however, that she is an investor. This means she does stand to benefit financially if the nuclear industry experiences a substantial take-off. Good for her, she is putting her money where her mouth is. She projects a set of beliefs, shared by the wider community of pro-nuclear advocates, that largely involves fighting the shadows cast by strawmen. She points out that it is simply false to believe that the world is made up of people who are kind-hearted, loving sorts, wanting to help others, and who are therefore automatically anti-nuclear, because they are the only people able to see the true threats which are intentionally hidden by the bad nuclear people, and in contrast, the greedy baddies who are pro-nuclear because they do not really care about humanity, and are only concerned with self-interest.

Isabelle says that the data on nuclear electricity proves that it is a really powerful and reliable energy source, with the smallest environmental footprint, which makes it “the missing ingredient to manifest a truly rad future.”



Isabelle Boemeke meets IAEA Director General, Dr Rafael Grossi at the IAEA 67th General Conference held at IAEA headquarters in Vienna, Austria, on 26 September 2023.

Photo Credit: Dean Calma / IAEA

AFRICA'S NUCLEAR POWER LANDSCAPE.

NOVEMBER 2025 HIGHLIGHTS



Koeberg's Second Life: South Africa Extends Unit 2 to 2045

South Africa's National Nuclear Regulator has approved a 20-year life extension for Koeberg Unit 2, allowing Africa's only operating nuclear power station to run until 9 November 2045. Eskom and independent reports highlight the extensive safety reviews and modernisation work behind the decision, reinforcing nuclear's role as a clean baseload in the country's future energy mix.

Cabinet Revives South Africa's Pebble Bed Modular Reactor Ambitions

Following recommendations from Electricity & Energy Minister Dr Kgosientsho Ramokgopa, the Cabinet has formally given the go-ahead to revive the Pebble Bed Modular Reactor (PBMR) programme. The decision, recorded in the Cabinet statement of 12–13 November, anchors South Africa's new Integrated Resource Plan, which leans heavily on nuclear and renewables to supply the bulk of electricity by 2039.

Egypt's El Dabaa Milestone: Reactor Vessel Installed at Unit 1

On 19 November, Egypt and Russia marked a historic construction milestone at El Dabaa: the installation of the reactor pressure vessel for Unit 1. Presidents Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and Vladimir Putin participated via video link in the ceremony, underscoring the strategic importance of Egypt's first nuclear power plant as a pillar of national energy security and a flagship African low-carbon project.

AFRICA'S NUCLEAR POWER LANDSCAPE.

... CONTINUED



Niger–Russia Uranium Deal Alarms Europe

An investigation revealed French anxiety over a potential sale of 1,000 tons of Nigerien uranium to Russia, reportedly worth around \$170 million. The yellowcake, produced by the French company Orano and stockpiled at the former Arlit mine, is at the centre of both legal disputes and geopolitical tensions, raising questions about the security of supply, non-proliferation, and the evolving nuclear fuel landscape in West Africa.

Ghana's Research Reactor Centre Hosts High-Tech Training Drive

At the Ghana Atomic Energy Commission's Research Reactor Training Centre, a week-long workshop (10–14 November) brought together students and young scientists for intensive training in machine learning and statistical modelling. While focused on data science, the programme, run with ICTP "Physics Without Frontiers," builds critical skills at a nuclear research hub, supporting Ghana's broader ambitions in advanced nuclear technologies and reactor operation.

Africa's Nuclear Narrative Consolidates Around SMRs and New Build

African nuclear developments are increasingly framed within a continental narrative: South Africa's PBMR revival, Egypt's El Dabaa construction progress, Ghana's SMR-focused training, and growing cooperation with Rosatom and other partners, all echo themes highlighted in the IAEA–G20 "Outlook for Nuclear Energy in Africa". Over 20 African states are now exploring nuclear options, with small modular reactors (SMRs) seen as especially well-suited to fragmented grids and industrial clusters.

NUCLEAR - A KEY PLAYER FOR AFRICA'S ENERGY AMBITIONS AND HYDROGEN PRODUCTION

KHENSANI BLONDIE MATSHATA

Africa is facing an energy crisis characterised by widespread electricity shortages and a heavy reliance on fossil fuels. With over 600 million people lacking access to reliable power, the continent is at a crossroads, needing to expand energy access while addressing the politics of climate change. The challenge lies in developing a diverse energy portfolio that can meet the growing demand sustainably.

Nuclear energy is emerging as a beacon of hope for Africa's energy development, particularly through its potential to produce low-carbon hydrogen. The World Bank's findings underscore the necessity of integrating nuclear power into the continent's energy strategy to meet growing demands sustainably by addressing the challenges and leveraging the benefits of nuclear and hydrogen technologies.

African nations can pave the way for a greener, more resilient energy future, ultimately driving economic growth and enhancing the quality of life for millions of Africans who currently have no access to sustainable electricity.

As Africa grapples with the pressing need for sustainable energy solutions, nuclear power becomes a vital component in the continent's energy supply. The World Bank's recent reports highlight the critical role of reliable, low-carbon energy sources in fostering economic growth and energy security. In this context, nuclear energy presents an opportunity not only for electricity generation but also for producing low-carbon hydrogen, which has significant implications for large-scale development across Africa.

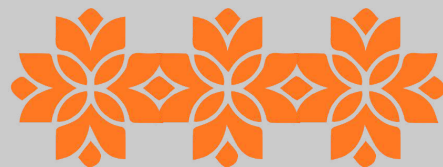
While the potential benefits are significant, challenges remain. Concerns about nuclear safety, waste management, and public perception must be addressed. Moreover, substantial investment in infrastructure and skilled workforce development is crucial for the successful deployment of nuclear energy in Africa. **CONTINUED ON PG 12**



Khensani B Matshata has 18 years of corporate experience in project management and business development in the energy, mining, and technology industries. She is a seasoned entrepreneur with business interests in energy, mining, property, finance, and construction.

Khensani is a qualified project manager and certified EDGE expert. She served as a board member of Pula Nala Mining and Energy, a SASOL BBBEE Consortium. She is an NECOM member at the Energy Council of South Africa, involved in distribution, market reform, wheeling, and generation market reform workstreams.

She's the current treasurer and founding member of Atom Africa, an NPO advocating for nuclear energy in Africa.



Leveraging nuclear energy for large-scale hydrogen production presents both significant opportunities and formidable challenges for Africa. With the right investments, regulatory frameworks, and public acceptance, nuclear-powered hydrogen production facilities could play a pivotal role in transforming the continent’s energy landscape and driving sustainable economic growth.

Engaging stakeholders across sectors will be essential to navigate the complexities of this transition and unlock the full potential of hydrogen as a clean energy source.

Africa needs sustainable energy solutions to meet growing energy demands.

Nuclear energy is a major solution. By investing in nuclear developments right now, African nations can meet their energy needs effectively and efficiently.

Distributed nuclear energy generation facilities across vast African countries can supply people from cities to remote villages, and so contribute to political stability. One can be sure that without a reliable electricity supply, in this fast-changing world, many Africans scattered across the continent are going to be agitating their political leaders, to enable them to use cell phone banking, transmit emails, buy goods online, and own an electric stove and fridge. Times are changing fast. A reliable electricity supply better keep up.

“Nuclear energy is a major solution. By investing in nuclear developments right now, African nations can meet their energy needs effectively and efficiently.”



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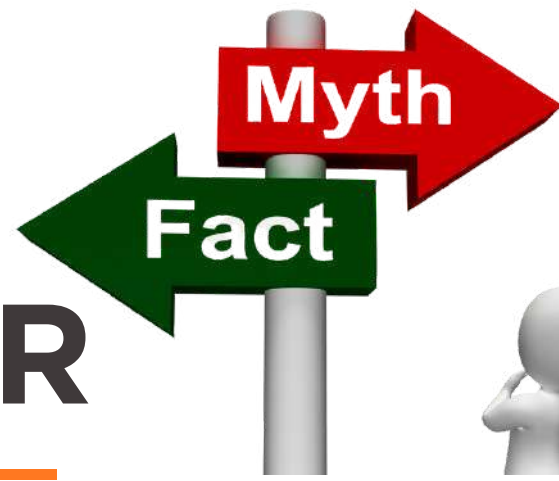
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MYTH BUSTER



MYTH: The "Glow-Getter"

Nuclear workers glow in the dark..

If that were true, we would've solved load shedding years ago... imagine thousands of human light bulbs walking around Koeberg.

FACT:

Radiation doesn't make you glow. What does shine, though, is the safety record of modern reactors... and the irony that people still believe comic-book physics.

Nuclear workers don't glow, but the industry's safety record certainly does.

MYTH: The Micro-Reactor Misunderstanding Small Modular Reactors are just tiny Chernobyls waiting to happen...

Sure, it heats up... but only one of them can make breakfast!

FACT:

Modern SMRs use passive safety systems that shut themselves down without human intervention, a feature your toaster (sadly) does not offer.

SMRs aren't "tiny disasters"; they're some of the safest, smartest energy tech ever designed.



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A GREEN LIGHT FOR PBMR – A SOUTH AFRICAN SUCCESS STORY?

EDITORS VIEW

It signals an opportunity to mobilise South African skills, rebuild local industry, and create a proudly South African Success Story in advanced nuclear engineering.

South Africa has entered a new chapter in its energy story. Recent statements by the Minister of Electricity and Energy, Dr Kgosientsho Ramokgopa, confirm that the government has revived the Pebble Bed Modular Reactor project. The PBMR was once one of the most ambitious nuclear technology programmes in the world, and its resurrection offers more than energy security.

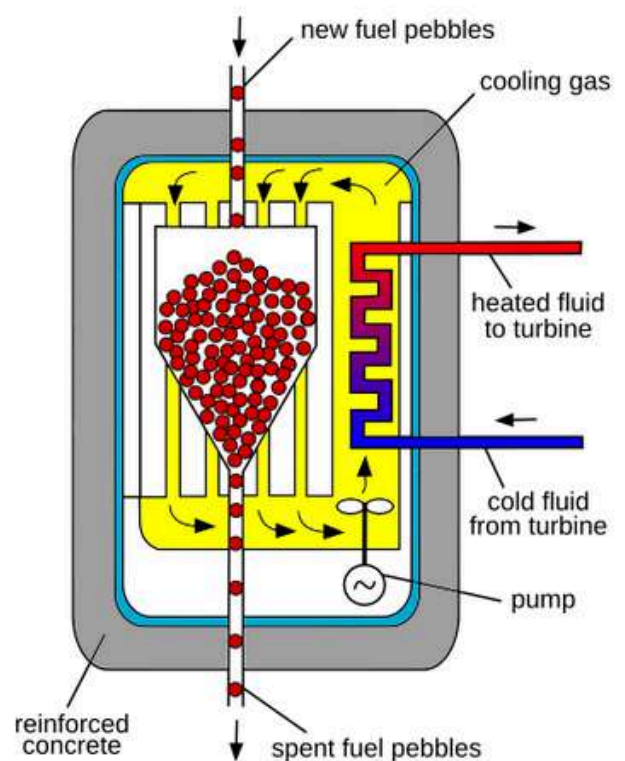
A Brief Look Back to Understand the Future.

The PBMR began in the 1990s as a homegrown high-temperature gas-cooled small modular reactor. It was based on helium-cooling, and fuel made from graphite “pebbles”, known worldwide as a safe and efficient nuclear technology. At its peak, the PBMR employed hundreds of scientists, engineers, artisans, and technicians. South African universities and private companies contributed research, mechanical components, and software systems. Although the project was halted in 2010 because of funding and market conditions, the technical knowledge and intellectual property were preserved.

The Minister’s recent announcement regarding the PBMR transfer to the South African Nuclear Energy Corporation (Necsa) signals that the government is now actively converting this legacy into a modern development initiative. This decision aligns with the Integrated Resource Plan’s (IRP2025) vision for new nuclear capacity and demonstrates a clear national commitment to a diversified, reliable, and clean energy future.

This can be a Proudly South African step forward! The global nuclear community has reacted with interest because this revival shows that South Africa is not only a consumer of high-technology energy systems but a country capable of creating them. It sends a message that South Africans can design, build, and export advanced small modular reactors in the same league as other leading nations. **CONTINUED ON PG 16**

Pebble bed reactor scheme



The pebble-bed reactor (PBR) is a design for a graphite-moderated, gas-cooled nuclear reactor. It is a type of high-temperature reactor (HTR)

Even more importantly, it shows confidence in South African talent. The PBMR rests on decades of work by South African Scientists and Engineers, and its revival places South African innovation back on the international map.

Unlocking Skills, Jobs, and Industrial Growth

The rebirth of PBMR offers one of the most significant skills-development and job-creation opportunities in the country. A modern PBMR programme requires thousands of highly trained professionals and artisans. It needs welders, fitters, precision machinists, electricians, coders, robotics specialists, safety officers, and a wide range of technicians. These skills strengthen not only the nuclear industry but the entire engineering and manufacturing base of the country.

A structured PBMR programme encourages:

Skills regeneration. Former PBMR engineers can partner with local companies. South African universities already have nuclear, materials, and mechanical engineering programmes that can be expanded through bursaries, internships, and research partnerships.

Industrial participation. South African companies specialising in heavy engineering, steel fabrication, electronics, control systems, and manufacturing will be able to supply components. This builds local capability, strengthens factories, and opens export opportunities.

Technology transfer and innovation. By collaborating with local private developers such as Stratek, South Africa can develop a modern ecosystem where the State, industry, and academia innovate together.

Fabricating TRISO Fuel and Local Manufacturing Strength. An essential part of PBMR's opportunity lies in fuel fabrication. South Africa already has a foundation in TRISO fuel development, which is in high demand as small modular reactors gain global momentum.

Activating TRISO production in South Africa will create highly skilled chemical, materials, and industrial engineering jobs and strengthen the nation's position in the nuclear value chain.

Component manufacturing for pressure vessels, heat exchangers, control systems, and auxiliary equipment could anchor long-term industrial activity. With proper investment, South Africa can become a preferred supplier for SMR components to African and global markets.

Creating a Sustainable, Export-Ready Future

The short-term priorities include government and private entities working together and collaborating with the Nuclear Regulator. Clear partnerships with industry should be established at the start. Over time, this will lead to demonstration units, followed by commercial reactors that provide clean electricity and industrial heat, for mining, petrochemicals, hydrogen production, and desalination.

In the long term, a successful PBMR programme will create thousands of jobs, generate export revenue, and boost national pride. It will demonstrate that South Africa can design and build world-class nuclear technology using local expertise and local companies.

A "Proudly South African" Opportunity?

If executed with a pro-South African outlook, the small modular reactor programme revival is more than an energy project. It is a national skills and industrial development mission that gives South Africa the chance to reclaim leadership in advanced nuclear technology. With strong collaboration between government, Necca, the private sector, universities, and expert partners, South Africa can build a modern nuclear ecosystem that powers growth, creates jobs, and inspires the next generation.

This can be a moment for proudly South African confidence. We have the knowledge, the heritage, and the talent right here in South Africa. Now we can turn it into a future that benefits our people and strengthens our position in the world.

Justine Burgess holds a TRISO Fuel ball fabricated in Pretoria.



NUCLEAR NETWORK AFRICA

THE WORLD OF NUCLEAR

Any person who has influence and a role to play in representing any Nuclear-Related Developments to advance nuclear power in Africa. or in any international entity, which can contribute to the development of Africa's nuclear energy capability is encouraged to be part of this great journey.

Any company, ranging in capability from a nut and bolt to the most sophisticated piece of equipment, should join the journey now.

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Sales and Marketing

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N²A IS AN INDEPENDANT PUBLICATION

Editor: Heather Veldhuis

Email: heather@stratekglobal.com

Cell: +27 (0)83 625 0316

Submit your article or topic for
consideration in our next N²A edition.

heather@stratekglobal.com



Rachel has been involved with our nuclear projects for over 10 years. She handles sales and marketing functions related to conferences, meetings, brochures, and publications like N²A

