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## Czechs put off decision on building new nuclear plants

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PRAGUE (Reuters) - The Czech government has postponed a decision on building new nuclear units, saying it needed more time to evaluate the impact on its budget and find out EU views on state aid for such a project.

The Industry and Trade Ministry, which is in charge of energy policies, said on Thursday it wanted the government to make a decision based on new information by the end of the year, half a year later than the current deadline, which itself had been pushed back.

"It is necessary to complete work on the impact on public budgets," minister Tomas Huener said in a statement after a meeting of the government's nuclear energy committee.

The new units would replace existing ones expected to be shut down in the future.

**Majority state-owned power firm CEZ has refused to invest into new plants without some form of state support.**

It has proposed a plan to split itself up instead, creating a fully state-owned nuclear and coal generation unit that would build the nuclear plants, and a partly private distribution and renewable energy firm.

Nuclear power has wide support among most Czech political parties but the high costs of new units have complicated the decision.

The government has been working with three options. A CEZ subsidiary could build new nuclear plants, with some form of state backing, or the government could buy a small CEZ unit to build the plants. The third option is the CEZ split.

The current government led by Andrej Babis is cool on the idea of splitting up CEZ.

The ministry said a meeting with the European Commission should take place in June to discuss what the state could finance if a plant were to be built by CEZ as a firm partly owned by private shareholders.

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