Proposed resumption of nuclear reactors to delay Moon's new energy policy

President Moon Jae-in may have been forced to push back the start of his new nuclear-free energy policy, as a public debate commission recommended Friday resuming the construction of two unfinished nuclear reactors the president had promised to scrap.

The commission said 59.5 percent of 471 citizens and experts who took part in the debate voted in favor of completing the Shin Kori 5 and Shin Kori 6 reactors, while 40.5 percent sided with the president to remove the unfinished reactors for good.

The presidential office Cheong Wa Dae said it respects the commission's recommendation, adding it will soon take necessary measures to resume the construction of the two nuclear reactors.

Such a swift response from Cheong Wa Dae comes after the president earlier said he would respect the outcome of the debate, noting it would mark the start of what he called "deliberative democracy."

"The process of reaching a social consensus requires a lot of time and money. But I believe it is a valuable process, considering the social cost we must bear when such decisions are made arbitrarily," the president said earlier.

Scraping the two new nuclear reactors was a key election pledge of Moon, who has also vowed to build a nuclear-free nation.

The outcome of the contentious debate on the fate of the two nuclear reactors will inevitably delay the start of the country's move toward that end, as well as the target date for completing the process.

The president has noted his new energy policy did not seek to immediately shut down nuclear reactors that are currently in operation, but to do so when they run out their natural-designed lifespan, a process he said would take at least four decades, considering the 40-year lifespan of the reactors recently built.

The Shin Kori reactors will also operate for at least 40 years following their completion, which is expected to take a few more years.

Before it was disrupted in July, the Korea Hydro & Nuclear Power Co. said the construction of the two reactors was 28.8 percent complete. Work on them began in 2016.

Officials at the presidential office Cheong Wa Dae insisted the president's new energy policy was launched the day he took office in May, saying the policy also relied on not building any more nuclear reactors.

The president also remains firm on building a nuclear-energy-free nation, they said.

"Up until now, the lives and safety of the people have been put in the backseat when establishing and implementing energy policies, while environmental considerations have also been overlooked," Moon said earlier.

"To build a safe Republic of Korea and keep pace with the global trend, we... have to implement a great shift in our national energy policy that will reduce nuclear and coal-fired power plants, and implement and increase the use of clean, safe future energy," (Yonhap)