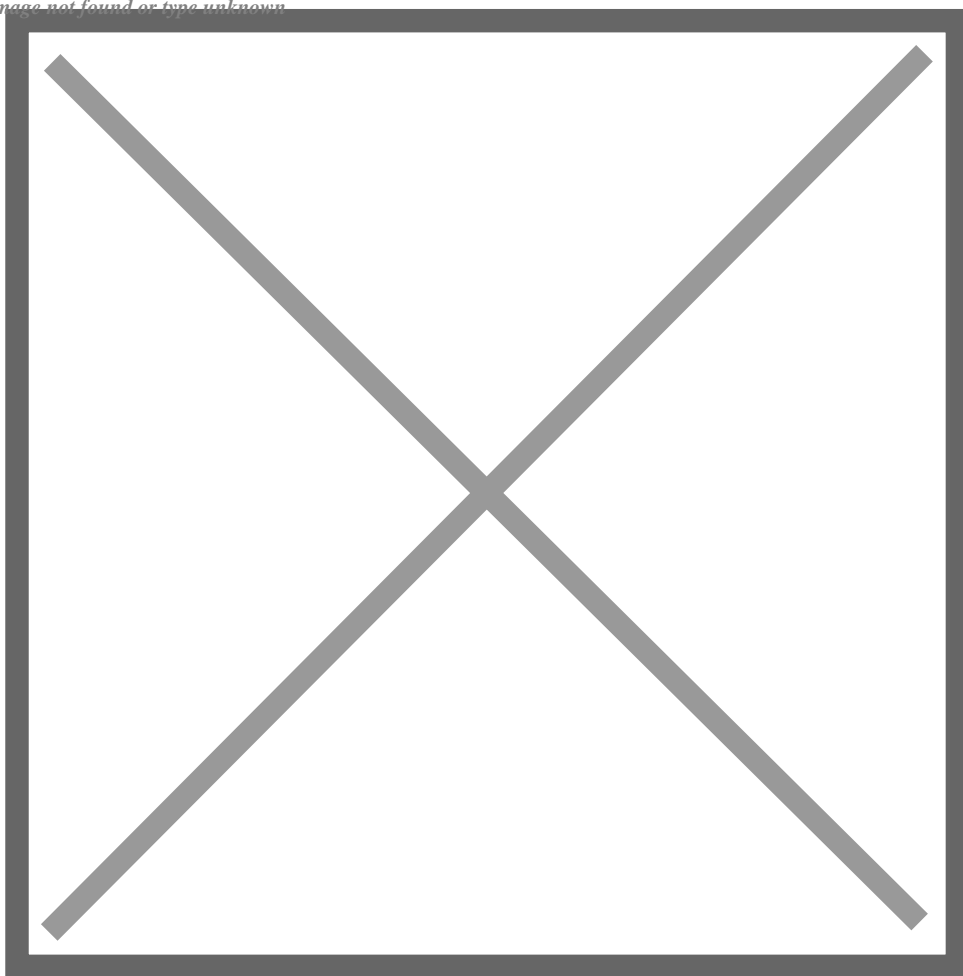


Nickel industry aware of its role in the Cuban economy

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Nickel industry aware of its role in the Cuban economy

By Roberto Morejón

The Cubans are making every effort to maintain their nickel production in order to mitigate the effects of the US blockade, the contingencies of the national electrical system and the volatility of prices on the foreign market.

With its main deposits located in the eastern province of Holguín, nickel exploitation is limited to two active mining operations: the Ernesto Che Guevara plant, which is entirely national, and the Moa Nickel S.A. joint venture between the largest of the Antilles and the Canadian company

Sherritt.

Local television recalled the three decades of the joint venture and highlighted in a report that the Pedro Soto Alba plant has not stopped its machines and continues to produce nickel and cobalt sulphides.

In the public report, the workers interviewed said they were highly motivated and underlined their willingness to resume the production rhythm thanks to improvements in the mines and metallurgical efficiency, reasons that predict a contribution of 32,000 tons this year.

If this target is achieved, the result will be higher than in the last two years, which is a good sign given the country's problems to generate electricity due to the obsolescence of its thermoelectric plants.

In addition, the Caribbean country suffered fuel shortages during the year, with supplies affected by the US blockade.

Hurricane Oscar also hit the eastern part of the archipelago in October, causing damage to the area, although, as the workers pointed out, the Comandante Pedro Soto Alba plant remains on course.

The nickel mine in the municipality of Moa, Holguín, and all of Energas SA's facilities, in which Sherritt participates, have returned to full capacity, the company said.

Energas is synonymous with efficiency, with two reliable combined-cycle power plants in the west of the country generating low-cost electricity from domestic natural gas.

Despite severe material shortages, mainly due to the US siege, the Cubans are confident of their potential, as the country has the fifth largest nickel reserves in the world.

It should not be forgotten that the Pedro Soto Alba plant, the base of the joint venture with Sherritt, is described as a thriving and sustainable joint business model.

Like the other processing site, it is working hard to overcome technological hurdles.

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