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'No' to nuclear energy is the right decision

THE government recently announced that it will not develop nuclear power for the nation ("Yeo Bee Yin: No to nuclear power for Malaysia", *The Star*, Nov 20; online at bit.ly/star_nuclear). This decision reportedly came after a lengthy deliberation and study with a view originally towards building a nuclear plant in 2030.

It is a momentous and logical decision for which the government should be highly commended. The decision is not only right for the nation and citizens, it is also a victory for the environment and the fight against pollution. Some of our regional neighbours will applaud this decision too, as they are well aware and wary of the far-reaching and dire consequences of any nuclear incident.

Many critics on social media are deriding the decision. Proponents of nuclear power claim that nuclear energy is clean energy for the future and that the latest generation of nuclear power plants are safer; this seems to form the entire basis of their support for nuclear power.

Perhaps these nuclear power

advocates should consider some of the trepidations listed below of those who are against using nuclear power for energy.

Many of the more developed European countries have already banned or are phasing out nuclear power. Why should we go into something that most countries that have had it before are pulling out of and are moving into renewable energy?

Malaysia presently lacks the technology and expertise to build a plant, let alone maintain it. We would be highly dependent on foreign knowledge, machinery, consumables and technology for a very long time. Do the supporters of nuclear power presume the lack of human resources and technical knowledge, machinery and consumables can be easily overcome when we are still struggling with our national car after so many decades?

The current cost of building a nuclear power plant ranges from RM27bil to RM38bil. In 10 years' time, the cost would have escalated. Even at current prices, can our

nation afford to build one?

Would nuclear energy supporters be willing to live permanently, with their families, within a 50km radius of the power plant? This would be a validation of these advocates' belief that nuclear energy is clean and safe.

And can they suggest a vast enough storage space for nuclear waste that will take hundreds of years to decay into harmless material? Again, would they live within a 50km radius of this radioactive storage space to prove that they are positive nuclear energy is a safe and viable energy option for themselves and the environment?

The city of Fukushima in Japan would be familiar with the issues after its 2011 disaster. And then there's Chernobyl in Europe, which melted down in 1986. The very first nuclear plant disaster, Three Mile Island in the United States in 1979, might have escaped the attention of the proponents of nuclear power. With each accident, the consequences and damage got worse. And while these three accidents were of a different nature,

human error and misjudgement were common factors in that the incidents were detected late and shutting down the plant was delayed.

Can the proponents of nuclear power assure this nation and its people that the latest generation of nuclear plants have enough fail-safe safeguards and can operate with total safety without discounting human error and fallibility?

These questions represent grave concerns and fears about a deadly form of energy capable of an explosion equivalent to many million tonnes of TNT coupled with pollution and environmental issues that affect land, water, the air, flora and fauna and also humans.

These issues are not challenges merely laid down before proponents of nuclear power to rebut and tick off. I offer them in the hopes that better understanding of the concerns and fears of many will deter any support for nuclear energy.

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