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`Nuclear energy can wait`

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‘Nuclear energy can wait’

Govt should invest in other sustainable options first, say groups

PETALING JAYA: Malaysia should focus on developing safer, sustainable sources of energy production before even considering nuclear power, say interest groups.

There were serious concerns over nuclear energy that must be properly considered before it is introduced into the country's power grid, said the Association of Water and Energy Research's president Piarapakaran Subramaniam.

"While nuclear energy is often classified as clean based on greenhouse gas emissions, this assessment overlooks other critical environmental parameters like radioactivity, toxicity and long-term environmental impact.

"When we measure nuclear energy together with these environmental parameters, we will see that it is not as clean as claimed by certain parties," he said, adding that public acceptance of nuclear energy is low.

The 13th Malaysia Plan (13MP), which was unveiled on Thursday,

stated that the government was considering the possibility of introducing nuclear energy as a clean energy source.

It also pointed out that the government would focus on developing and upgrading sustainable energy production infrastructure across the country, which include hydrogen hubs in Terengganu and east Malaysia.

However, Piarapakaran said the government should be cautious about over-investing into possibly over-hyped energy solutions such as the plans for hydrogen hubs.

He said hydrogen fuel, which uses a double energy conversion process to produce energy, is not efficient and should only be channelled to hard-to-abate sectors due to the possibility that it may be replaced by newer technologies in the near future.

"New emerging energy technologies, especially disruptive ones, may replace some of the current hyped solutions like hydrogen.

"We need to be very mindful of where we invest and how it impacts future costing and return on investment," he said, adding that investing in lower-cost proven sustainable energy solutions would be more financially feasible for the country.

Water and Energy Consumers Associations of Malaysia president Saravanan Thambirajah similarly advised caution in bringing nuclear energy to Malaysia.

"While modern nuclear reactors are much safer than in the past, the risks of catastrophic failure, although low in probability, carry extremely high consequences as we have seen in incidents like Fukushima.

"The issue of radioactive waste disposal remains unresolved globally.

"Combined with the capital-intensive costs to set up a nuclear plant, it could delay progress in other, more immediately deployable renewable energy solutions.

"Nuclear energy should only be pursued under the strictest governance, with full public accountability, and after exhausting all other low-risk, renewable, and decentralised energy options," he said.

Saravanan said the government should instead focus on enhancing current energy efficiency and grid modernisation as well as scaling up solar and hydropower to prepare for a more dynamic and cleaner energy future.

While he welcomed the government's plan to further develop green hydrogen hubs, he said that clear policy frameworks, safety standards, and certification mechanisms must be in place to ensure Malaysia's competitiveness in the emerging hydrogen economy.

"We must also not forget that upholding indigenous rights, environmental integrity, and fair benefit-sharing must be part of the process," he added.