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Going nuclear

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Geek Speak

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A decade from now, how are our cities going to be powered? Will the proliferation of electric vehicles continue, thus shaping our public transportation and day-to-day lives? Will our offices and homes be powered by solar, wind or hydro? Will there be a new form of energy that shapes our world? Perhaps it will be antimatter, as described in the book *Angels and Demons* by Dan Brown.

Your guess is as good as mine. Will nuclear power be the answer? The disasters in Fukushima and Chernobyl are stark warnings for us Malaysians to not go down this route. We, as humans, are cursed to repeat our mistakes, but maybe it will be different for us. Maybe this time it could work?

Nuclear is not exactly new for Malaysians. We have been operating a nuclear reactor, known as the TRIGA PUSPATI Reactor, since 1982, but it's a different story when it comes to powering the grid with the infamous energy source.

In 2018, the then prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad pulled the plug on nuclear development in the country and shifted the focus to renewable energy. However, the tide has shifted, with the race to net zero piling up the pressure. Minister of Economy Rafizi Ramli has said that the country will not rule out nuclear power generation. Granted, this is before considerations are made to integrate it into the country's energy mix.

All this is well and good, but is it even possible? Small modular reactors could be the answer. They are small and less costly compared to traditional reactors and they could bring about a nuclear renaissance.

In fact, the US, Russia and China are battling it out to assert dominance in selling these reactors, according to CNN. Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability Minister Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad is keen on SMRs due to the fact that they can be deployed quickly. How will Malaysia fit into the nuclear race?

The imagery with nuclear is never a good one, from the doomsday clock to Godzilla. Greenpeace and Sahabat Alam Malaysia have said nuclear power is a dangerous option to keep. As it can never be a green and peaceful solution, they have urged the government to go with the "no nuclear power" decision. Whether you like it or not, Malaysia and the world are on the hunt for an energy source that does not pollute yet maintains the consumerism habits that are fuelling the planet. Nuclear is no quick fix and everyone involved needs no reminder of this.

I don't know what the future will look like, but I sure hope I don't see a mushroom cloud from my office windows as I write an article on how artificial intelligence is going to change the world, for better or worse.