

Chernobyl: Lessons For Malaysia 25 Years After
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According to the Health Ministry in Kyiv, more than 2.32 million people, including 452,000 children, have been hospitalised in the Ukraine for illnesses blamed on Chernobyl. A recent estimate puts the number of cancer deaths from Chernobyl at 27,000 and excess cancers at 53,000 people. The governments of Belarus and Ukraine devote 5 percent of their national budgets to treating survivors and patrolling the no-go zone around Chernobyl.

The nuclear industry has been at pains to stress that another Chernobyl can't happen again. While it is probably true that an exact copy of the disaster is unlikely to be repeated, this claim is misleading on two counts.

One, it is possible for an equal or greater nuclear disaster to take place, as it has in Fukushima.

Two, nuclear disasters like Chernobyl leave a legacy of radiation pollution that last thousands of years. In this sense, the Chernobyl disaster is still ongoing. Several governments have recently pledged up to \$780 million (RM2.3 billion) for a new shelter to replace the crumbling sarcophagus that presently entombs Chernobyl. Chernobyl is still so radioactive that the new shelter cannot be built directly over the existing one without endangering workers. Instead, it is being constructed off-site before being slid into place on rails.

Who could imagine that the pursuit of electricity supply could have such terrible consequences?

Today, Barisan Nasional under the administration of Najib Razak is aggressively presenting nuclear power as a cheap, safe and reliable electricity option. However, reality shows it is anything but.

The expected cost of the two nuclear plants proposed under the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) is RM21.3 billion up to 2020.

They have not told us about the cost of safely and securely disposing all the nuclear waste the plant will generate. Nor have they told us where this waste can be stored.

Responsible nuclear waste storage requires deep repositories in geologically-stable bedrock, free of contact with water. Finland requires the waste to be secure for 100,000 years and they are constructing a 500m-deep waste facility at Onkalo will be completed in 100 years time, by the 22nd-Century. Malaysian experts have so far proposed storing waste in old tin mines, in Sarawak, and deep sea disposal, all of which are inadequately insulated from water and are of questionable geological integrity.

By the time the two nuclear plants are planned to come online in 2021, the cost of solar power is expected to be highly cost-competitive.

Malaysia's new Renewable Energy Act 2011 has already made it possible to acquire solar power at negative cost over the long term. In 2011, Malaysia stands to be the world's number three producer of solar cells. We are not even in the top 50 of countries with nuclear power expertise. Malaysia is also blessed with the natural resources for other

renewable energies such as micro-hydro and biomass.

Nuclear power comes at great cost to the economy and our health. If an accident happens through human error, poor construction, or natural disaster, the costs will be far, far higher.

Why expose Malaysians to such a risk when there are renewable energy alternatives that are safer and cheaper in the long run?

A responsible government should reduce the problems its people face, not add to them. Malaysia does not need nuclear power. Every ringgit pledged towards nuclear should go instead towards clean and genuinely green energy alternatives. Our future and our children's future is worth it.

We cannot let Malaysia join Chernobyl and Fukushima as by-words for nuclear disaster.

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