

Nuclear energy merits rational discussion
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in how they work, as is the regulatory framework, which sets astonishing new benchmarks for the care and quality required at every stage of the process. The case against nuclear power is deeply rooted in concerns over safety in general and radiation in particular.

The Fukushima accident, having reinforced too many opinions and reshaped too few, makes it vital that we try to bring clarity to these issues -- especially in those countries, including the United Kingdom, where the notion of a sustainable energy policy remains undetermined.

While we know the corollaries of high levels of radiation exposure, what happens at the other end of the scale is less clear. The world is full of radioactivity -- walls, concrete, even bananas contain traces -- and our bodies have adapted to it. In countries like Brazil and India, people live in environments that have 20-200 times the radiation commonly found in the UK, apparently with no negative genetic effects. Some experts even argue that we may need a degree of radioactivity to stimulate our immune systems. Of course, there remain concerns around the vital issues of waste disposal and proliferation. Again, consensual debate is required.

But that requires formulating a roadmap that tells us where we stand and what we must do. We need to create the necessary culture of dialogue within industry and academia. We need to encourage people to think and reflect more. Above all, we need to enhance the public's grasp of the energy sector as a whole. Currently, there is too much "I know" and "This is what I firmly believe", frequently from influential people, in cases where there is no incontestable right or wrong. Fukushima is one of them.

It is still not too late -- not quite -- to start couching the broader discussion of nuclear energy in language that will inform rather than alarm, and in terms that will nurture well-balanced judgments rather than entrench long-held biases. Project Syndicate

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