

Nuclear issue a ticking time-bomb

By Chiu Hua-mei 邱花妹 /

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On April 30, former Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) chairman Lin I-hsiung (林義雄) ended his nine-day hunger strike. It is good that Lin could return to his family safely and continue to work with the people of Taiwan for the realization of democracy and a nuclear-free homeland. However, the ruling Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) should be aware that the public's concerns about nuclear disaster and our hopes for democracy have not weakened.

The KMT government has stressed that construction of the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant in New Taipei City's Gongliao District (貢寮) will be "suspended," not "terminated."

Meanwhile, President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) and Premier Jiang Yi-huah (江宜樺) continue to exert power over the KMT and the executive and legislative branches of government. They have not responded to demands for lowering the referendum threshold. There are now three issues that the Ma administration and KMT mayors, county commissioners and legislators must address.

First, the government's proposal to "seal" the plant's No. 1 reactor, which has already been completed, and suspend work on the second reactor is not convincing. It falls short of public expectations for a nuclear-free homeland, and it does not meet taxpayers' demand that the government stop sinking big money into the project.

According to the KMT, the No. 1 reactor will still go through a safety check before it is sealed. Equipment continues to degenerate and parts will have to be replaced regularly. Starting up operations in future may cost as much as NT\$100 billion (US\$3.32 billion). If it really is to function fully in the future, that cost together with the budget for maintenance and nuclear waste disposal will be astronomical.

Will future generations really thank us for giving them this choice? Have we actually given them a choice, a pile of rubble or a ticking time bomb? One wonders how the government will be able to convince us that suspending construction and sealing the plant is a better choice than breaking the contract, which is only expected to cost NT\$10 billion to NT\$12 billion.

Second, if the KMT is unwilling to stop construction of the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant, it should lower the referendum threshold by amending the Referendum Act (公民投票法). Negotiations between the legislative caucuses on Feb. 26 last year decided that the government should not budget for the construction of the plant before a referendum is held, that it should not install nuclear fuel rods into the reactors and that each caucus should recommend experts to form a team overseeing the government's handling of the matter.

Moreover, the legislature also decided that there should be talks over the draft amendment to

the Referendum Act before holding a referendum. Since the KMT's legislators are reluctant to hold talks, the Sunflower movement's campaign to recall certain KMT lawmakers is likely to continue.

Third, the KMT should stop issuing threats that Taiwan may suffer blackouts, power shortages and electricity price hikes if the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant does not go into operation. The government has been threatening to implement power rationing if Taiwan does not build the plant ever since 1988.

Perhaps the most ridiculous statement was made in 1993 by then-minister of economic affairs Chiang Pin-kung (江丙坤), who claimed that Taiwan would face power rationing of six hours per day starting from 2010 if the plant was not built. In fact, the nation's reserve electricity exceeds the total nuclear-generated electricity, showing that reliance on nuclear power is relatively low. In addition, after the Ma administration proposed to freeze construction of the plant, should it not change its resistance to the transformation of Taiwan's energy structure as soon as possible, in order to implement the delayed transformation?

Lin launched his hunger strike and Taiwanese have demonstrated a determination to move toward a nuclear-free homeland. The government should face up to calls for using the limited resources available to adjust Taiwan's energy structure, to decommission the three elderly existing power plants and to dispose of nuclear waste safely.

It should not continue the construction of the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant, which will create more nuclear waste that will last for thousands of years.

Taiwanese are not only capable but also determined. What we need is a government willing to take on this transformation. If the KMT refuses to return power to the public or realize our dream of a nuclear-free homeland, we will have no choice but to replace it in 2016.

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