

MST, Monday, 10 May 2010

A decision that letters is long overdue

ANY announcement on a nuclear power programme evokes reaction and debate, which is a good thing. A good debate can educate the public and their opinions can influence any decision.

The announcement by the energy, green technology and water minister on Tuesday that Malaysia will have its first nuclear power reactor operating in 2021 is a case in point.

The decision is long overdue. Malaysia considered the use of nuclear power as early as the 1970s, culminating in the setting up of the Malaysian Nuclear Agency in 1972, known as the Tun Ismail Atomic Research Centre (Puspati) then. The focus of the agency, however, was directed to the non-power producing applications of nuclear technology as the petroleum industry developed.

In the face of dwindling resources, rising energy demand, and detrimental environmental effects of some energy resources we have today, it is very timely to reconsider the nuclear option.

Nuclear power supplies 14 per cent of global electricity need, using over 400 safely operating nuclear reactors. The International Atomic Energy Agency, in its report last year, projected that by 2020, the global nuclear electricity share would be about 15 per cent, growing to 16 per cent by 2030.

The Asian region is experiencing the fastest growth. Japan has over 30 per cent of its electricity needs

fulfilled by nuclear energy, and South Korea almost 40 per cent. Both countries have never looked back and continue the programme to power their development.

Lessons have been learned from Chernobyl. Nuclear power reactors are becoming safer. It is subject to safeguards, regulations, strict safety procedures, quality materials and high technology.

While the need for sufficient and secure energy should be the main motivators, these are also some factors that have a bearing on the technological orientation of our society. Are we not capable of this?

**DR NAHRUL KHAIR ALANG
MD RASHID**
Malaysian Nuclear Society
Kajang, Selangor