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## Region not ready for N-energy

South-east Asian nations should consider alternative energy options

Letter from Kwan Jin Yao

THE report, "An Asian nuclear renaissance" (Oct 23-24) by Venessa Lee, is a balanced commentary on the scientific and socio-political debates revolving around the potential use and expansion of global nuclear energy.

However, against the assortment of background information and experiences with nuclear power, the article has failed to consider the culture, politics and geographical significance of the South-east Asian region; contextualise the cost-benefit analysis to weigh the feasibility of proliferating nuclear usage; and identify the inactivity of regional organisations – in terms of gathering governments – in addressing the concerns.

The benefits of nuclear



energy are plenty: It is a sustainable form of power that significantly reduces carbon emissions, it eases our addiction and dependence on coal and oil, and fuel costs for maintenance are relatively low, et cetera.

However, besides the pertinent concerns on the level of radiation and the safety of the infrastructures of the reactors, nuclear technology is far from refined. As such, the International Atomic Energy Agency has not been able to develop a sound blueprint on how radioactive waste produced by power stations can be properly

disposed of, or guarantee the reliability of the processors in different conditions.

More notably in the region, the capital cost of building new reactors is extremely high; and countries with poor industrial safety records or problems with political corruption would be rendered exponentially vulnerable.

Contracted companies and government officials, tempted by the large amounts of money at stake, would seek means and ways to cut corners and to bypass safety checks. The complexity of the designs – coupled with negligence – can have disastrous consequences. Qualified professionals and personnel are also far and few between.

Furthermore, the geographical location of South-east Asia – prone to earthquakes,

tsunamis and volcanic eruptions – makes nuclear accidents even more probable.

Simply put, South-east Asia is not yet ready to develop nuclear energy and technology en masse. Nuclear energy would not be the panacea for climate change and might instead compound existing concerns of a nuclear war, and introduce new ramifications in the form of environmental degradation or safety concerns.

Governments need to balance the desire for change with the controversies surrounding its adoption, and consider alternative energy options – as nuclear technology progresses – before advancing. Otherwise, this nuclear renaissance might spell nothing but disaster for the South-east Asian people.

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