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Environmentalists push for green energy action

ALTERNATIVE ENERGY: Activists said the government should take action instead of just mouthing slogans on cutting emissions and developing renewable energy

By Meggie Lu

STAFF REPORTER

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Dozens of environmental groups staged a protest in front of the Taipei International Convention Center (TICC) before the two-day National Energy Conference (NEC) commenced yesterday, urging the government to consider developing renewable energy instead of relying on coal or nuclear power plants.

The groups also demanded the government carry out conclusions reached at the conference, instead of letting them sit until the next meeting.

"We call on the government to focus on discussing responsible energy and policies to tackle climate change," Taiwan Environmental Protection Union (TEPU) deputy secretary-general Lee Cho-han (李卓翰) said.

Lee said that although yesterday marked the third time the nation has held an energy conference at the national level, "the officials like to hold meetings, but little is done afterwards."

"We do not want to see 'low carbon' become a mere slogan again," Homemaker Union and Foundation (HUF) chairwoman Yen Mei-chuan (顏美娟) said.

The nation's energy policies should include developing sustainable and clean alternative energies, such as solar, wind and tidal power, former HUF chairwoman Chen Man-li (陳曼麗) said.

"Taiwan generates only 1 percent of its energy from resources originating from the island [like solar]. In other words, 99 percent of our energy is imported [generated from oil and coal]," she said.

Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Legislator Wang To-far (王塗發) agreed, saying that besides potential safety problems, "Taiwan is entirely capable in the technical sense of developing alternative energies like solar power, but the government's emphasis on nuclear power development will suppress these developments."

Green Consumers' Foundation chairman Jay Fang (方儉) also joined the rally, holding an oversized poster of a cartoon featuring a nuclear plant as a giant monster crushing a wind turbine into pieces, while holding the hand and leading a blindfolded President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九).

A group of residents living near the construction site of the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant in Taipei County chanted slogans such as "Nuke Four (核四) is unsafe, do not let this piece of junk operate" and "Nuke Four, give me back my illegally expropriated land."

Besides developing cleaner energies, power conservation and green policies are also key to solving global warming, Green Party Taiwan (GPT) secretary-general Pan Han-shen (潘翰聲) said.

"Taipower last year introduced a market mechanism where domestic users who reduce their electricity usage get a discount on their bills; the company said that together the savings in power last year amounted to the equivalent of planting 1 million trees," Pan said.

"We all know that these 'million trees' did not come from building a new power plant, but has to do with conservation," he said.

Pan said that on Earth Day last year, Ma promised to impose carbon taxes and lower income taxes.

"Let's remind him of this ... It would be a real waste for the government not to introduce a similar market mechanism after this conference," he said.