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## Energy is a hot topic

The National Energy Conference currently being held in Taipei has pushed energy issues into the spotlight. This comes on the back of news earlier this week that German wind power company InfraVest **threatened to withdraw from Taiwan** if the government did not implement policies to support renewable energy.

At the conference President Ma called on the Legislative Yuan to **pass the renewable energy law**. The *Taipei Times* reported the DPP and KMT finger pointing at each other over the failure to pass the renewable energy bill. Both parties must shoulder the blame. The DPP controlled the executive for eight years and failed to implement effective energy policies. The pan-blue parties had a majority in the legislature during this time and failed to pass the renewable energy and greenhouse gas reduction laws.

The challenges **Taiwan** faces in energy policy are enormous. It is a small densely populated island which is almost entirely reliant on imported sources of energy, be they fossil fuels or nuclear. Although the development of the renewable energy sector is very important, energy demands from the industrial sector cannot be met by renewable sources alone. If Taiwan wants to maintain its export-oriented manufacturing economy then continued use of either coal or nuclear power is hard to avoid.

This raises the specter of an expansion of nuclear power. When DPP was elected in 2000 they had a policy to stop construction of the fourth nuclear power plant, however they were defeated on this issue and the construction of the fourth power plant went ahead. The KMT has no ideological opposition to nuclear power and its return to power means that potential expansion of nuclear power in Taiwan is back on the agenda.

One of Taiwan's most distinguished scientists and academics, Nobel laureate Lee Yuan-tseh (李遠哲), **backed the use of nuclear power**. This was in opposition to the views environmentalists who **protested outside the conference**. The *Taiwan News* made nuclear power the topic of **their editorial** today. The *Taiwan News* suggests the KMT has ulterior motives in supporting nuclear power.

In fact, nuclear power is the first choice of the KMT party-state, bureaucratic capital and big business community, less for its alleged "low carbon" character and more for the convenience of

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massive taxpayer financed construction budgets and lucrative government and state enterprise contracts and centralized control over power grids.

Although Lee Yuan-tseh expressed support for nuclear power it was qualified and he was critical of the KMT's mentality. The *Taiwan News* again writes,

[Lee] put the question facing all of Taiwan's 23 million people in stark terms by highlighting the urgency of awakening to the inevitability of radical changes in economic production and consumption patterns and lifestyles if we are to avoid the global eradication of humanity.

Lee also pointedly broke with the single-minded obsession of the KMT government with promoting fast growth rates as the ultimate policy goal by placing primacy on "global humanity competitiveness" instead of "national economic competitiveness."

The environmentalists protesting also raised similar concerns. However, the issue of changing lifestyles and new economic models is not really discussed in Taiwan outside the world of NGOs and academia. It is a vitally important topic, but one that has yet to engage mainstream discussion.

Although the issue of climate change is being mentioned here, peak oil seems to not even be on the radar. Yet this may also become a reality within a decade or two. This makes it doubly important for the urgent implementation of policies which will secure Taiwan's future energy supply in a world of climate change and peak oil.

There are no simple solutions at all to the energy issues, however it is clear that both government and industry in Taiwan must make development of the renewable energy sector a high priority. Taiwan can play a dual role of manufacturing green energy technologies for export as well as using renewable energy to meet an increasing percentage of its own energy needs. There also needs to be a broader debate about lifestyles and how Taiwanese should live in the 21st century.

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Posted: April 16th, 2009 under [Environment](#), [News & media](#), [Taiwan](#).

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## Comments

**Comment** from [Passing By](#)

**Time** April 16, 2009 at 3:44 pm



One really needs to differentiate between the con and undemocratic process that led to selecting the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant site and nuclear power in general.

There are a lot of technologies now that make nuclear much safer, including pebble bed technologies, and the fact of the matter is that the other alternative for cheap power—coal—releases tons of radiation, mercury, sulfur, and other yummy garbage into the atmosphere that nuclear wouldn't. Besides that, there are those hundred year long coal seam fires that keep popping up all over the place, including in China. Do we prefer that over nuclear?

Yes, radiation is a problem, but so is coal. Everything else is too expensive or needs vast amount of environmentally toxic and expensive batteries to modulate to be reliable (wind and solar).

It is insightful to notice why the KMT might be for nuclear other than to solve Taiwan's energy problems, but it doesn't negate the problem of coal pollution or the problem of unreliable and expensive wind/solar and that nuclear may still be the only viable alternative to these.

**Comment** from [Drew](#)

**Time** April 16, 2009 at 8:18 pm



I find the Yale endeavor to rank countries totally incredible. How did they manage to rank Taiwan 145 out of 146 one year (2005), 24 out of 133 another year (2006), then 40 out of 149 another (2008)?

If you're going to give countries a number, it's only useful if you keep it consistent over time and you can make year-over-year comparisons...

BTW, feels like things are going slow in the Taiwan-blogsphere these days. Less regular updates, lack of innovation or big projects or surprises... Any idea why?

**Comment** from [cfimages](#)

**Time** April 16, 2009 at 9:28 pm



The best first step would be a heavy campaign about efficient resource use. That doesn't need to come from the govt - it just needs some financial backing to make TV ads. Teaching people that they

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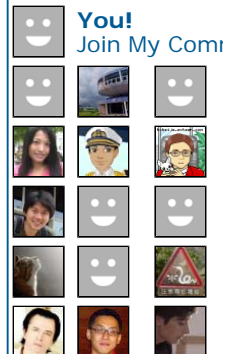
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shouldn't be doing things like leaving their engines running while they eat dinner or take a 3 hour nap in the car; having aircon set to arctic temperatures in stores; leaving lights etc on all the time; watering the road; all these things can be implemented quite easily and they will get people in the right frame of mind to demand the politicians act for the bigger things that require govt intervention/assistance.

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**Comment from Drew**

**Time** April 16, 2009 at 10:10 pm



I forgot to mention—Kaohsiung City is doing something very, very interesting and is better than this idiotic subsidies to renewable energy: they are attempting impose a carbon tax on all polluters in Kaohsiung!

Instead of say, favoring wind power, or any source, let the market take care of itself by forcing polluters to pay for the damage they are causing to the local environment and the globe (as reflected in Taiwan's poor environmental reputation worldwide—the EU sooner or later is going to impose sanctions on Taiwanese goods).

Sorry, can't find an English link! Probably something about Taipei Times reporters never leaving cushy Taipei and bothering to report anything non-humorous and non-political.

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**Comment from Drew**

**Time** April 16, 2009 at 10:15 pm



Sorry, I think Twitter is making my brain dumb: here's a link to [Public Television's Political Talk Show talking about energy policy in Taiwan](#). Some interesting points to think about.

sitemeter

**Comment from David Reid**

**Time** April 16, 2009 at 10:33 pm



Thanks for the great comments everyone.

Passing By, I must first state I am opposed to nuclear power. I do realise that in recent years it has won support from scientists and policy makers as part of the necessary response to climate change. However, the long lead times for construction of reactors are contrary to the urgent need to cut carbon emissions in response to climate change. Nuclear is at best a stop gap measure and doesn't solve the problem in the long term. We need to think beyond coal and beyond nuclear.

Drew, I guess the result in 2006 was due to some flaw in the methodology or missing data. Taiwan certainly has a lot of environmental problems, but I don't think it ranks as the worst in the world.

I think the popularity of blogging has passed its peak. Facebook and Twitter seem to be where the action on the internet is at the moment. That said I still think blogging is a very powerful medium that won't go away. The changes that are happening in traditional media will mean blogs have a very important role to play. The future of blogging may be quality rather than quantity.

cfimages, education is really important. The DPP's failure on the nuclear issue may have been due to powerful political forces, but I feel greater effort should have been put into educating the public about the issues. It may not have stopped the fourth nuclear plant, but it might have helped put Taiwan on a better track for the future rather than the aimless position it is in now.

**Comment from David Reid**

**Time** April 16, 2009 at 10:40 pm



Drew, here is [the link](#) to the article about Kaohsiung City taxing pollution.

**Comment from Drew**

**Time** April 17, 2009 at 12:41 am



Ah, good to see they had an article up. From the Chinese, I read that the central government probably wouldn't allow it to happen. But it's a good way for Kaohsiung to get back at the central

government for years of dumping the most polluting heavy industries all in Kaohsiung without any compensation whatsoever.

I spent a few minutes researching online and I found very little information about this supposed German company InfraVest. I wonder if it's actually just a small company that purports a German-ness that doesn't extend much beyond its founder and that they probably then turn around and subcontract to German firms.

It appears that they only do business in Taiwan and China. It's very strange to me that a large global concern could have such poor English on their website. Something is fishy, and while I do agree there needs to be more renewables in Taiwan, I bet they are just making a lot of noise without actually planning on leaving Taiwan. But yeah, very strange company...

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