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Taiwan president demands passage of statute for 'clean energy'

Advocates and opponents of nuclear power square off in national energy conference

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Taiwan News, Staff Reporter
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2009-04-16 12:23 AM

President Ma Ying-jeou called on the ruling Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) Cabinet and the KMT-controlled Legislature to pass the long-stalled draft statute for the promotion of renewable energy during a national energy conference yesterday.

Ma's statement followed two days of high-profile complaints by the German-based IntraVest Wind Power Group which has warned it could pull out of its current wind power projects in Taiwan because the "punitive" power buy back price of NT\$2 per kilowatt hour set by the state-owned Taiwan Power Co compared to up to NT\$5 per kilowatt hour for private natural gas powered thermal plants.

After declaring that Taiwan has the responsibility to act as a "world citizen" and "conserve use and clean sources" of energy, the president instructed Premier Liu Chao-shiuan and his Cabinet to "combine the seven existing versions of the renewable energy development statute into one version and work with the Legislative Yuan so that it will be passed in this legislative term."

The president urged the conference to keep in mind that "sustainable development is the common goal of humanity and comprises a balance between economic development, social justice and environmental sustainability," which he described as "our 'no regret' commitments to future generations."

However, Ma mistakenly stated that the meeting was the "second" National Energy Conference" and thus skipped over the NEC held by the former Democratic Progressive Party government in June 2005.

In his speech, Ma said the government had set targets to boost energy use efficiency by two percentage points annually and to reduce energy density, the ratio between the amount of energy used for each US\$1,000 increase in gross domestic product, by 20 percent from its 2005 level by 2015 and by 50 percent by 2025.

In terms of "clean sources," the president announced that the KMT government aimed to slice carbon dioxide emissions to 2008 levels by 2020 and to 2000 levels by 2025.

Moreover, Ma said all government agencies should incorporate "policy environmental protection" into their planning and stated that the infrastructure projects in the just-approved NT\$500 billion, four-year special public works budget should "all consider environmental protection."

The president also related that the current global financial storm would cause a "reshuffling" of the global economy and said "green industries," such as solar power and LED lighting should be promoted to provide sources of "green" and stable economic growth.

Former Academia Sinica president Lee Yuan-tseh warned that scientific and technological progress will not be enough to avoid the threat to world survival posed by global warming and stated tht "we must realize that we must change our lifestyles and abandon the wasteful energy use practices in excessively developed societies."

"We demand green policies not high carbon nuclear power as nuclear power in energy generation may emit relatively less carbon but the overall life-cycle is high and also encourages industries to waste high amounts of energy," said TEPU President Wang Chin-shou.

Nobel Charitable Trust Executive Director Michael Nobel stated that "energy efficiency probably represents the greatest opportunity available for Taiwan" for research and development funding as well as biofuels, organically grown photovoltaic cells and wind parks.

Former DPP premier Yu Shyi-kun said that Ma's promise "only covers one third of what is necessary and may well not be realized," noting that the KMT controlled Legislative Yuan failed to pass "three green laws" proposed by the former DPP administration.

Yu said that the draft renewable energy development stature, a draft greenhouse gases reduction law and a draft energy tax law were all necessary to promote energy efficiency improvements, provide sufficient authority to the government to set legal standards for carbon dioxide reduction and provide sufficient tax incentives for renewable energy promotion.

Although neither Ma or Liu mentioned nuclear power, a series of speakers advocated the incorporation of stronger language backing the "safe development" or active promotion of nuclear power as a "transitional" or "last resort" power source. However, represent-atives of environmental groups, DPP lawmakers and renewable energy companies, including IntraVest, objected to the push to endorse a stronger role for nuclear power.

After Economic Affairs Minister Yin Chi-ming announced that the conclusions would be grouped into three categories of "consensus views," "majority views" and "other views," DPP Legislator Tien Chiu-chin objected that the since attendance was by invitation and imbalanced, there was no foundation for "majority views."



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