

Academics urge energy liberalization

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National Taiwan University professor Kao Cheng-yan, right, speaks at a forum on the deregulation of the energy industry yesterday.

The liberalization of the energy industry is a likely solution to the nation's current disputes over nuclear energy, the root cause of which lies in the sector's monopolization by state-owned Taiwan Power Co (Taipower), academics said yesterday.

The administration of President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) is insisting on raising electricity prices and ensuring the commercial operation of the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant in New Taipei City's (新北市) Gongliao District (公寮) "to make up for Taipower's losses," National Taipei University economics professor Wang To-far (王迺夫) told a seminar.

The seminar, organized by Taiwan Association of University Professors and Taiwan Environmental Protection Union, was held to discuss the liberalization of the energy industry and the use of nuclear energy following the recent release of several white papers by the Executive Yuan.

Free competition and the separation of electricity producers, distributors and sellers would "naturally rationalize the price of electricity," Wang said.

Taipower could continue operating the nation's nuclear power plants and hydropower stations could remain state-owned, but the rest of the market should be opened to private businesses, he said.

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Citing the privatization of the nation's telecommunications market as an example, National Chung Hsin University professor Chen Chi-chung (陳其雄) endorsed Wang's proposal, saying that the liberalization of the telecom market contributed to lower prices and an improvement in the protection of consumer rights.

If Taipower was in charge of electricity distribution and power plants were privatized and alternative energy promoted, the market would benefit consumers and energy efficiency would be improved, Chen said.

With regard to the debate about nuclear energy, academics said the government is misleading the public by claiming that power shortages would occur if the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant does not go into operation.

The potential risk of electricity shortages is a "flat-out lie," Taiwan Thinktank president Wu Rong-i (吳榮益) said, adding that the nation has a reserve energy capacity of more than 10 percent "even if nuclear power was abandoned altogether."

National Taiwan University atmospheric sciences professor Hsu Kuang-jung (許光榮) said past incidents and investigations have shown that nuclear energy is "neither safe, cost-effective nor sustainable."

"Over the long term, the development of alternative and "green" energy sources is still the best option and the cheapest," said Chen Yen-hao (陳延豪), an assistant researcher at Taiwan Institute of Economic Research.

Developing alternative energy sources serves two goals: the ultimate replacement of fossil fuels and the curbing of carbon emissions, he said.

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