

Pro, anti-nuclear activists clash verbally

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Anti-Nuclear Action Alliance convener Kao Cheng-yan, center, and others hold up signs with the text “Fourth Nuclear Power Plant referendum, let the public decide” outside the Joint Central Government Office Building in Taipei yesterday.

Photo: Lo Pei-der, Taipei Times

Supporters and opponents of nuclear energy verbally clashed yesterday at a public hearing held by the Central Election Commission, as it reviews a referendum proposal on whether fuel rods should be inserted to start test operations of the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant in New Taipei City.

“How will we handle nuclear waste? How will we evacuate the millions of residents in Greater Taipei in the event of a nuclear disaster? I don’t think we should continue developing nuclear energy until we can answer these questions,” an anti-nuclear activist surnamed Sui (聿) said. “Moreover, a nuclear power plant can operate for up to 40 years, and produce hundreds of tonnes of nuclear waste. How much should we pay for 40 years of energy supply?”

Sui said that instead of another nuclear power plant, the nation may be better off investing in the development of green energy.

“If we have a stable source of green energy, we will not only be free of the risk of a nuclear disaster, but also free of unstable energy prices on the international market,” Sui added.

Sui said that government officials — including Deputy Minister of Economic Affairs Woody Duh (杜鵬程) — were trying to block the referendum through technical issues, such as the wording of the proposal.

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Huang Shih-hsiu (黃士修), a physicist and supporter of nuclear energy, said that nuclear energy and nuclear waste can be completely safe if handled well.

“A nuclear power plant can be very safe. You don’t immediately start regular commercial operations after inserting fuel rods. You still need to conduct tests for months or even up to one year before starting official operations,” Huang said. “We can handle nuclear waste safely. It is absolutely safe if you seal it in a steel barrel and place it in a concrete shell.”

Huang also questioned the validity of the referendum proposal made by anti-nuclear activists, saying it does not seek to “change a government policy, as the Referendum Act (公投法) stipulates.”

“The government policy now is to not insert fuel rods or start operation, but the [referendum] proposal aims to stop the government from inserting fuel rods and starting [the plant’s] operations,” Huang said. “It should be rejected.”

Dozens of anti-nuclear activists demonstrated outside the building as the hearing was held.

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