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Time for Malaysia to revisit nuclear power

ENERGY SECURITY

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THE Russia-Ukraine conflict has exposed a new reality about the world energy mix.

In the United Kingdom, a prime minister was unseated because of a rushed job to address the country's high energy costs.

The capping of energy prices for UK household heating with no clear strategy on how to pay for the subsidy, cost Liz Truss her job.

In the European Union, countries dependent on gas from Russia worry about how they will manage as winter approaches and demand for energy rises.

Elsewhere, the spike in world oil prices, hovering around US\$100 per barrel, has been identified as the prime mover of global inflation which is threatening world growth, so soon after a slow recovery from the pandemic.

Energy is back on the world agenda of economic concerns.

Everyone is talking about energy security. Many dwell on the



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need for countries to diversify their energy sources. Many agree it is unwise to be dependent on sources controlled by unstable powers.

Interest in renewable energy is riding high again, especially solar and wind. This is further buoyed by climate negative news from scientific experts now meeting in Egypt, this year's host of the COP27 climate summit.

Public announcements from climate scientists suggest that the world is not making much headway reining in global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, as

agreed in previous COPs.

They say methane emission is one GHG which has shown the highest growth.

They warn that the lethargy in taking action will cause a 2.5°C rise in global temperature by the end of the century.

This will shatter earlier pledges to limit the rise in temperature to 1.5°C.

Energy is a critical element as the world strives for sustainability. It is a key driver of world manufacturing and the economy.

Without affordable energy, the quality of life will likely suffer, not only for the lighting that energy provides but more so for the heating that countries in temperate regions need.

A wrong choice of energy source is what contributes to the climate disruption that now upsets agriculture and unleashes natural calamities around the world.

Though the use of fossil energy, especially coal, is much to blame,

the companies behind fossil fuels are coming up with innovative solutions to reduce emissions. Technologies such as carbon capture utilisation and storage are showing promise.

Faced with such pressures, countries are looking to be energy independent.

Apart from renewables, nuclear has again emerged as a possible alternative. Nuclear energy is on the cards because it produces no GHG emissions and is cost competitive in the longer term.

But critics of nuclear continue to remind the world of the dangers of radioactive waste and that mining for uranium is not emission-free.

Notwithstanding these concerns, the UK is considering the nuclear option. Even earthquake-prone Indonesia has announced an interest to invest in nuclear, as well as Vietnam.

Not to mention Japan, where public opinion is shifting in favour of nuclear despite the

country's recent misfortune at Fukushima.

In the meantime, nuclear scientists are investigating other options of fusion rather than fission.

The use of thorium instead of uranium is also being researched to reduce the threat of nuclear weapons proliferation, which the anti-nuclear activists are also concerned about.

Malaysia has yet to do any serious rethink of the nuclear option. Before the Fukushima incident, nuclear power was being considered for the country's energy mix.

As our neighbours ramp up their interest in nuclear power, we may need to revisit the idea.

It is time the government took a calculated risk not to dismiss the option, for the sake of the country's energy security.

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