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Big potential in Malaysia to profit from methane capture technology

I SEETHED with anger and cynicism when I read the headlines in the Western media that are following the ongoing COP26 climate change summit in Glasgow, Scotland. All I can say to those who are beating their chests and pounding tables to support the fight against climate change is they are doing too little too late.

Small and inconsequential as we may be, a few of us in Malaysia saw the menace posed by global warming and were already trying our utmost best to talk to major players involved in the oil and gas industry and timber and plantation companies since 2001, urging them to look at various activities like reforestation and, more importantly, methane capture.

All we got for our trouble was a polite discussion and a cup of tea. We were even invited by a visiting delegation from the United States that was then under the George W. Bush Administration, and were advised not to pay any attention to people like Al Gore, their former vice-president.

Following are the significant developments we were involved in:

- > We submitted business proposals to major companies in Malaysia to undertake reforestation projects in Sarawak that were sanctioned by the state government;

- > We created a consultancy that basically offered help and expertise on carbon capture/trading under the Kyoto Protocol; and

- > We managed to secure an agreement to get the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) approval for three palm oil mills to start methane capture for a large public listed company. The methane captured was converted into electricity, which was sold to Tenaga Nasional Berhad. Due to the collapse of the carbon market, however, methane capture in palm oil mills is not economically viable at the moment.

The above are just a microscopic view of what we were doing. I am not trying to plug a business here. God willing, I will be 85 years old by the end of this month and I am not interested to start something I have abandoned. Moreover, my wife is the victim of a stroke that left her physically disabled, and I am her main care giver.

But there is a huge opportunity for Malaysia to participate as a big player in the methane capture market. When I started my business in early 2000, there were more than 500 palm oil mills operating in Malaysia and every one was emitting methane openly.

Some mills may have installed methane capture facilities, but the potential is still there for those who are interested in taking a closer look.

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