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ENERGY MIX

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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia has been actively laying the groundwork to pave the way for a possible nuclear application in the country's energy mix, although it may not materialise in the foreseeable future.

The big question is, who will spur the civil nuclear project in the country — private firms or government-related energy giants like Petroliaam Nasional Bhd (Petronas) or Tenaga Nasional Bhd (TNB), which are said to be keen to undertake the massive development?

With the war between the United States and Iran continuing, Malaysia has seriously considered alternatives and examined many countries' energy initiatives.

Just last week, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) shared at a national workshop or-

ganised here that focused on human resource development modelling, a strategy that supports workforce planning by projecting future staffing needs, as the country looks to build capacity to support current and future nuclear applications.

Juwai IQI global chief economist Shan Saeed said Malaysia's evaluation of civil nuclear energy is strategically sound and economically timely.

He said under the 13th Malaysia Plan (13MP), nuclear power is being assessed as a low-carbon component of the country's future electricity architecture, with Malaysia Programme Office for Power Electricity Reform Corporation (MyPOWER) coordinating a feasibility process aligned with the IAEA's Milestones Approach.

"The 13MP sets an initial operational ambition of 2031, al-

though deployment must remain conditional on safety, regulatory readiness and commercial viability," he said here recently.

The booming of data centres across the Asean region, which has seen Malaysia leading the growth, strengthens the economic case. Apart from that, Malaysia is also aggressive in driving its initiatives toward becoming an AI nation by 2030.

"The gains would extend beyond data centres to semiconductor fabrication, electrical and electronics manufacturing, chemicals, advanced materials and green hydrogen.

"Nuclear could complement Malaysia's renewable-energy base with firm generation when solar output fluctuates, while diversifying the power mix and reducing exposure to imported-fuel volatility."

With the government laying the groundwork, Petronas and TNB will likely lead the commercial initiatives, based on their strength and capacity.

Shan said the optimal model would be government-led, but commercially disciplined.

He advised that MyPOWER should remain the programme coordinator, supported by the Energy Commission, Atomic Energy Department and the Malaysian Nuclear Agency.

Apart from capacity building, the most important task is finding a suitable nuclear application to fulfil the country's energy needs.

Petronas and TNB are believed to be looking at some civil nuclear options, including third-generation nuclear fission.

"I think we need to consider all the attributes of what makes it

secure. You have to make sure you can take on the cost of delivering nuclear energy because it's super expensive to build. Once built, the ongoing operating expenditure is very low," said a source close to the deal.

Meanwhile, an industry specialist said that with the growth rate Malaysia is having, particularly with the proliferation of more data centres in the region, nuclear energy would generally be an option that cannot be avoided.

If Malaysia wants to remain competitive as an economy, it needs to have AI, meaning having some sovereign control over data centres, to make sure it moves to the next industrial wave.

"Six industrial waves have been driven by AI. And you can't have that without nuclear," the specialist said.