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PEOPLE BEHIND THE POWER

AS he steps out from behind the desk, the man looks like he has not aged. At 78, he does not look a day older than the politician who retired from the Cabinet in 2004.

The familiar bush jacket is there, the white hair, the keen look and the energy. And if there is one man on whom the word energy can be used, it has to be Tan Sri Leo Moggie, now chairman of Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB).

Moggie was the minister in charge of utilities for much of his 26 years in the Cabinet – as Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Minister (1978-89, 1995-98), and then as Energy, Communications and Multimedia Minister (1998-2004). Between 1989 and 1995, he served as Works Minister.

He has been the energy company's chairman since his retirement from politics in 2004.

He is passionate about his role in TNB, and the statutory body Lembaga Elektrik Negara (LEN) before it. He knows a lot about its past and has a key role as it reimagines itself for the future.

"When I started out in 1978, peak demand was less than 2,000MW, compared to more than 18,000MW today. It's a huge increase and is reflective of the economic growth of the country."

It did not just happen. A lot of planning and thought went into meeting the growth in demand. War in the Middle East sent fuel prices skyrocketing in the 1970s till the early 80s and it wasn't good for Malaysia.

At that time, says Moggie, the Government even mulled building a nuclear power plant. However, the need never arose.

Petronas confirmed sizeable reserves of offshore natural gas, giving Malaysia a cheaper alternative to oil-driven power plants. The availability of natural gas may have been opportune but it was not the opti-



'Today, 99% of the peninsula is electrified,' says Moggie. At peak demand, TNB generates more than 18,000MW of electricity.

mal solution.

Diversification of fuel is very important, says Moggie. Malaysia has to have access to several sources apart from oil. This led to the Government's formulation of the 4 Fuel policy in 1981 that identified four sources of

energy for the country – oil, natural gas, hydro power and coal. Except for coal, all energy sources were available at home.

Gas-fired power plants have a tendency to "kick" themselves out of the grid if there is a problem in stability. "If several plants kick themselves out at the same time, we would be in big trouble," Moggie says.

Trouble did hit in 1996. On Aug 3, the Paksa plant in Terengganu failed, leading to a cascading effect that hit the peninsula.

Moggie, then the Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Minister, remembers the day as a leisurely Saturday when he took his family out for dinner in Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur.

"The shops were dark. I asked what was wrong and went to the TNB headquarters to see what had happened.

"Only then did I realise how big a problem it was. I sent my family home and stayed with the TNB staff as they worked round-the-clock to bring back the power."

By early Sunday morning, power was restored.

"The TNB people have always been hard-working. It's like one huge family. From the beginning, they have always carried out their tasks responsibly."

He points to rural electrification as one such task. In the late 1970s and early 80s, parts of Perak, Terengganu, Pahang, Kelantan and Perlis were still without electricity and TNB's predecessor LEN started its Bekalan Elektrik Luar Bandar Division to embark on its rural electrification programme.

"Today, almost the whole of the peninsula is electrified except for some Orang Asli settlement areas. It is a testament to TNB's good track record of carrying out its responsibility and of always being at the forefront of change."

The 1996 blackout also led to innovations in the design of the electricity grid to isolate and minimise breakdowns. There were a couple more blackouts after that episode – in 2003 and 2005 – but in both cases, the breakdowns were successfully contained within a few states and overcome within hours, thanks to the isolation programme and the upgrading and enhancement of power generation and distribution systems and processes undertaken after 1996.

The work is ongoing, with supply getting better and steadier. TNB has a good track record but it still has its eyes on the future.

Oil may be a thing of the past and gas may no longer be sufficient. Moggie says there are other options to explore. Solar power may be a big addition in the age of the smart grid. With modern systems, power harnessed in large-scale solar farms or from decentralised generation can be fed into the grid.

But that too, he says, is not a panacea and has its challenges. Solar power is intermittent and dependent on nature and difficult to store. Electricity generated needs to be used, it can't be kept. The development of storage technology for it is still a work in progress.

"The future may see us using more solar power to complement base load power generation. Also clean coal technology, which helps to reduce pollution, is now available. Utilisation of waste may also provide some answers in the future," he says.

Energy efficiency needs to be given greater focus. Most importantly, the power lies in the hands of the consumer. The future, Moggie says, is about efficient use of energy, not just in industries but also household consumers.

Turning that air-conditioner off when it's not needed may be a vital first step.