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CLIMATE CHANGE

CLIMATE LEADERSHIP, CLEAN GROWTH CRUCIAL FOR SURVIVAL

The United Kingdom seeks to collaborate with Malaysia to help address the climate challenge issues we face



Malaysia is embarking on an ambitious renewable energy generation target — to grow the share to 20 per cent by 2025. An example is the net energy metering programme, to catalyse and scale up renewable energy growth. REUTERS PIC

THIS month the United Kingdom Parliament declared an environment and climate emergency. Many countries are following the UK's lead.

The United Nations says we could have just 11 years left to limit a climate change catastrophe, and that a million species are at threat of extinction due to human activity. We are eroding our economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life worldwide and need to make rapid, transformational change. Young people around the globe are rightly calling on governments to do more — act now to prevent disaster later.

That's why I've come to Kuala Lumpur this week. I want to build a strong partnership between the UK and Malaysia on tackling climate change. We have a responsibility to allow our children to live in a world not irreversibly damaged by human activity. All countries must work together to make our economies cleaner and greener — now and for future generations.

I know that people in Malaysia have voiced out their concern over the impact of climate change to which they are particularly vulnerable. A two degree temperature rise — likely if we do not scale back carbon emissions urgently — would increase the frequency and intensity of extreme weathers in Malaysia, which include major flash floods in cities. If the high emission scenario continues, and without large investments in adaptation, an annual average of 234,500 Malaysians are projected to be affected by flooding due to a rise in sea levels between 2070 and 2100.

What can we do? A large part of the answer is to reduce carbon emissions by investing rapidly in green growth. Clean and sustainable energy, transport, agriculture and industry means cheaper energy, more and better jobs,

cleaner air, better health and nutrition, more liveable towns and cities and an enriched natural environment. The UK, as a climate leader, has reduced emissions by 43 per cent since 1990, while growing the British economy by two thirds. We are determined to speed this process up further — the UK's independent Climate Change Commission recommended this month that the UK legislate now to reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, which would make us the first major economy to pass laws to end our contribution to global warming entirely.

All our unabated coal-fired power stations will close by 2025, and just last week the UK announced that it had gone for over a week without using any coal to generate power. That's a good feeling. Yet only seven years ago, coal produced 40 per cent of the UK's power. With an ambitious clean growth strategy and strong investment in and commitment to renewables, transformational change is possible and economically fruitful. It is win-win for the climate and for the economy.

The International Renewable Energy Agency estimates that renewable energy will be cheaper than unsubsidised fossil fuels everywhere in the world by 2020. Offshore wind in the UK (40 per cent of the world's total) is already cheaper than coal, nuclear power and gas. India is investing

heavily in solar and wind — from 50 gigawatts to 225 gigawatts in the next four years. South Africa and Chile have successfully pivoted away from coal.

I know that Malaysia is embarking on an ambitious renewable energy (RE) generation target — to grow the share to 20 per cent by 2025. In addition, the new government is also ramping up energy efficiency in public sector buildings, undertaking a holistic electricity market reform; and tabling a new bill in Parliament on Energy Efficiency and Conservation by this year.

Malaysia is increasingly recognising its own huge potential for renewables, particularly solar (much better than the UK), biogas and biomass, though its renewable energy targets which would help meet its 4.8 per cent annual electricity demand growth, provide economic opportunities and growth.

Growing the RE portfolio in the energy mix would help Malaysia make that transition of unlocking the country into a negative long term trend for emissions, financial instability through stranded fossil fuel assets, and declining health (coal-fired power contributes to around eight million premature deaths globally each year, primarily in Asia).

During my visit to Malaysia, I will be discussing how the UK's expertise and support can encourage Malaysia's low carbon

transition through our various joint partnership programmes. I am keen to offer the UK's expertise in legislation and policy making, institutional framework set-ups, mitigation measures, addressing climate risk, our global leadership on renewable energy generation, low emission/electric vehicle technology and as a global centre for green finance (City of London). And our Prosperity Fund Asean Low Carbon Energy Programme will invest in growing Malaysia's capacity to access the green finance needed for transformational change.

At the international level, I hope the UK and Malaysia can collaborate towards ambitious UN climate talks in Chile this year and particularly in 2020, when I am lobbying for Britain to host the talks. Such a partnership could help energise this region, and the world to address the scale and urgency of the climate challenge we face. We must invest in climate leadership and clean growth — for the sake of our children and future generations.

The writer is Special Representative for Climate Change United Kingdom Foreign & Commonwealth Office. He will be in Kuala Lumpur today and tomorrow (May 15 & 16) and will meet with Minister of Energy, Science, Technology, Environment and Climate Change Yeo Bee Yin to launch the Malaysia Chapter on Climate Governance Initiative (CGI)

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