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Energy transition must fit M'sia not global pressure

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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's energy transition policies must be based on national realities and domestic capabilities rather than simply adhering to international pressure, said Malakoff Corporation Bhd chairman Tan Sri Che Khalib Mohamad Noh.

The priority is ensuring energy security and stable supply for its ever-growing population which now stands at 34.6 million, he said.

While Malaysia supports the global shift towards clean energy, the country must adopt a pragmatic strategy that reflects its own limitations and energy demands.

"We can follow the global trend, but what is more important is that our policies must be suitable for Malaysia," he said, echoing Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's call earlier on Monday for a pragmatic and balanced approach to ensure a just and equitable energy transition for Asia.

The prime minister emphasised that this approach is crucial for the region's continued development amid its shift towards renewable energy.

In an interview on Bernama TV's "The Nation" programme, Che Khalib said the

public often associates the National Energy Transition Roadmap (NETR) with solar energy, but Malaysia's ability to scale solar is limited by competing land use and inconsistent sunlight.

"In Malaysia, land is also needed for food production and forest conservation, we are not like the Middle East where you can just build solar farms in the desert, we have to balance our priorities," he said.

He also pointed out that solar energy, while important, cannot be treated as a dependable power source due to weather variability, and stressed the need to improve fossil fuel efficiency in the short- to medium-term, rather than phasing it out entirely.

"Take cars, for example. Thirty years ago, a 2.0-litre engine was considered underpowered. Today, a 1.0-litre car can perform just as well. Similarly, fossil fuel plants must be upgraded to emit less while producing more," said Che Khalib.

Energy security is crucial, he said, citing Spain and Portugal as prime examples. The two countries experienced blackouts after solar generation suddenly dropped due to weather changes.

"They celebrated reaching 100 per cent renewable energy one day, but when solar production dropped from 18,000 to 8,000 megawatts the next day, the system couldn't handle it," he said.

Che Khalib said that while Malaysia has set a target to reach 70 per cent renewable energy by 2050 under the NETR, it must maintain a secure and stable energy supply throughout the transition.

"In my opinion, over the next 50 years, we will still rely on fossil fuels. We can't just push them out overnight," he said.

He acknowledged that while solar panel recycling remains an open question, the technology is expected to evolve.

"Most solar panels last about 20 years. The glass is already recyclable, and I believe that in 20 years, the rest of the components will be too. We brought in the tech; disposal solutions will follow."

He also expressed support for exploring nuclear power as a reliable option in the long term.

"If we're serious about sustainable and dependable energy, then nuclear should be considered. It's time the government looks at it seriously," added Che Khalib. —Bernama