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Despite govt's rosy picture, some companies say gains have been uneven

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PETALING JAYA: Two years after it was unveiled as a key pillar of economic policy, the National Energy Transition Roadmap (NETR) has generated RM18bil in investments.

These investments have created about 12,000 direct and indirect jobs, according to the Energy Transition and Water Transformation Ministry (Petra), which oversees the NETR.

In the past two years, the installed capacity for electricity generation from renewable sources, including solar photovoltaic (PV), biogas and biomass, has gone up from 27% to 30%, Petra said.

Industry players, however, say

the gains have been uneven, with SMEs sidelined and many jobs going to unskilled migrant workers instead of certified Malaysians.

Some question whether the growth in renewable energy capacity is a result of the NETR or due to large-scale solar PV farms that have either existed or been approved before August 2023.

"I believe the NETR has come up short in some of its aims," said Datuk Muhamad Guntor Mansor Tobeng, who heads a renewable energy firm.

"If the government wants NETR to succeed, ministry officials must come down to the ground to see what is actually happening."

The executive summary of the NETR's official document states that if it is successful, the plan could lift gross domestic product

(GDP) from RM25bil in 2023 to RM220bil in 2050, while creating 310,000 jobs.

In its latest figures, Petra says it has approved renewable energy projects that could potentially generate about 3 gigawatts (GW) of electricity.

"Of those 3GW, 2GW will be produced from large-scale projects, while 1GW is expected to be supplied from distributed generation projects such as rooftop solar PV, biogas and biomass," Petra said.

Muhamad Guntor questioned Petra's claims.

"Only large-scale solar projects have progressed, but the NETR cannot take full credit for these because they have been around since before 2023."

He also questioned the claim

that 12,000 jobs were created, saying that the number came from the Large Scale Solar (LSS) project in 2021 and the Corporate Green Power Programme in 2023.

Sri Sutesh, who operates a solar panel installation firm, observed that low-skilled migrant labour often replace certified Malaysians.

"Companies still prefer to hire uncertified migrants who are cheaper," he said, adding that it should be mandatory for solar installers to use only workers certified by the Sustainable Energy Development Authority (Seda).

"Otherwise, Malaysians will not be motivated to get these certifications, which can cost RM8,000."

Sri Sutesh also urged Petra to have a scheme similar to Net Energy Metering (NEM), which expired on June 30.

The scheme allowed households and businesses with solar panels to generate electricity, which can then be injected back into the grid, thus reducing their power bills.

"When there was NEM, we averaged between 10 and 15 projects per month."

"But without NEM, we only have about five per month," Sri Sutesh said.

To ensure that the NETR's benefits are evenly spread, Muhamad Guntor also urged Petra to ensure that some large-scale projects involve small and medium firms.

"Tenaga Nasional was supposed to build 500MW worth of projects with SMEs, cooperatives and bumiputra companies. After two years, the initiative has yet to take off," he said.