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PETALING JAYA: Climate change is not a "con job". That was the firm rebuttal from Malaysian experts after United States President Donald Trump dismissed global warming in those words during his address to the United Nations General Assembly.

Universiti Tenaga Nasional Institute of Energy Policy and Research director Dr Nora Yusma Mohammed Yusoff said the remark may resonate politically in the US but contradicts mounting evidence of climate disruption already being felt in Malaysia.

"Global energy-related carbon dioxide emissions hit a record 37.4 billion tonnes in 2023, pushing global temperatures more than 1.2°C above pre-industrial levels.

"Every additional tonne of carbon dioxide (CO₂) takes us closer to breaching the 1.5°C Paris Agreement threshold," she said.

She noted that the International Energy Agency attributed part of this increase to droughts affecting hydropower, which forced greater reliance on fossil fuels despite the growth of renewable energy.

"Each tonne of CO₂ traps more heat in the atmosphere, intensifying floods, droughts and storms. Burning fossil fuels also worsens air quality, exposing people to dangerous particulates while reinforcing climate instability."

Malaysia has already paid a heavy price. The 2021-2022 floods killed nearly 50 people, displaced 400,000 and caused losses estimated at RM6.1 billion.

"These were not isolated events. Since 1970, Malaysia has repeatedly endured catastrophic floods and with heavier rainfall in a warming climate. Such disasters are expected to become more frequent and more costly," she said, adding that against this backdrop, Malaysia has set its course for a low-carbon future.

➤ Scientists warn dismissing global warming undermines urgent action, with the country already bearing cost of deadly floods and worsening environmental impacts

Under the National Energy Transition Roadmap the government aims to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 and raise renewable energy capacity to 70%.

Instruments such as the Bursa Carbon Exchange and a planned emissions trading system are expected to accelerate industrial decarbonisation.

Fiscal measures and policy incentives have also been introduced to make clean energy more accessible and to help meet Malaysia's Paris pledge of cutting emissions intensity of GDP by 45% by 2030, compared with 2005 levels.

But Nora stressed that fossil fuels remain dominant in the country's electricity generation, leaving it vulnerable to volatile fuel markets and local climate extremes.

"The global energy transition is changing the economics. In many markets, solar and wind are now cheaper than new coal or gas plants. Every delay in cutting fossil fuel use adds billions in future disaster costs," she said.

She warned that dismissing climate science at the global level could weaken Asean's sense of urgency, encourage free-rider behaviour and undermine progress on shared initiatives such as the Asean Plan of Action for Energy Cooperation and regional power grid integration.

"If climate finance or technology transfers decline, Malaysia must diversify partnerships, expand South-South cooperation and use Asean's collective bargaining power," she said, adding that the cost of delay would be devastating.

"The real 'con job' is inaction. Every postponement magnifies destruction and

steals Malaysia's chance of a safe and sustainable future. For us, delay is not an option. Climate change is not a 'con job' - it is a crisis already written in Malaysian skies, rivers, floodplains and in the rising global carbon count."

Universiti Utara Malaysia's Assoc Prof Dr Mohamad Faisol Keling agreed that Trump's remarks were deliberate political rhetoric.

"Environmental challenges affect all countries, including the US.

"But under the America First policy, traditional security and economic interests have been prioritised over non-traditional threats such as climate change."

He added that this approach reflects Washington's broader tendency to focus on domestic concerns rather than collective global action.

"The America First policy has impacted healthy trade relations, creating a form of injustice in which weaker countries face coercion and exploitation, while the US prioritises issues directly tied to its national interests.

"Trump's remarks are largely rhetorical. The US tends to focus on issues of national importance rather than broader global concerns, with non-traditional issues often treated as secondary."

Mohamad Faisol said Malaysia should take the opportunity at the upcoming Asean Summit to champion stronger regional cooperation on climate.

"Asean must present a united front to secure international attention and attract the support needed to safeguard global and regional security."