



27 AUG, 2025

Freedom means having control of energy sources

The Star, Malaysia



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EVERY year as we celebrate National Day, we reflect on Malaysia's journey of freedom, resilience and progress. Yet, independence today is not only about politics or borders but also economic strength, technological capability and, crucially, energy.

Malaysia's energy story began in 1894 in Rawang, Selangor, when Loke Yew and Thamboosamy Pillai installed an electric generator to power their tin mines. This marked the dawn of electricity in Malaya, a resource that has powered our nation-building ever since.

From the early hydro projects in Raub to the Central Electricity Board (1949), and later the National Electricity Board (1965), energy infrastructure became central to development. In 1990, Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB) was formed, ushering in a modern era of power supply.

Just as political independence in 1957 was about self-determination, energy independence today means ensuring that Malaysians have secure, affordable and sustainable energy without over-reliance on external sources. This has become even more critical amid volatile global fuel prices and rising geopolitical risks.

Malaysia remains an energy exporter, but it is increasingly dependent on imported coal and gas. More than 70% of our coal and about a third of our natural gas are sourced from abroad. This reliance exposes us to global market shocks, which directly affect electricity tariffs and, ultimately, household budgets.

At the same time, we are facing growing pressure to transition to cleaner energy. The National Energy Transition Roadmap (NETR) has set ambitious goals for renewable expansion and decarbonisation by 2050. Progress is visible – solar, hydro and biomass are growing steadily – but each comes with limits. Solar requires costly storage, hydro depends on rainfall, and biomass remains small in scale. This is why debates around natu-



ral gas imports and even nuclear energy have resurfaced.

Energy independence is not simply about producing more; it is about producing smarter. Policymakers worldwide often speak of the "energy trilemma", which balances three goals:

- > Security: Ensuring stable supply through diverse sources;
- > Affordability: Keeping energy accessible to households and businesses; and
- > Sustainability: Meeting climate commitments while protecting future generations.

Balancing these three is no easy task. A sudden pivot to renewables risks instability; over-reliance on fossil fuels exposes us to price spikes; and delaying climate action threatens our long-term well-being.

Other nations are showing how public behaviour and policy choices matter as much as technology.

1. Japan closed most reactors

after the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011 but revived nuclear power when energy security became a crisis. Public acceptance shifted once safety and transparency improved.

2. South Korea tried reducing its nuclear reliance in 2017 but reversed course when rising costs and supply risks angered citizens.

3. Germany shut down its reactors after Fukushima, but the European gas crisis reignited debates on whether the decision was premature.

The lesson is clear – public trust, disciplined institutions and consistent policies shape energy futures as much as infrastructure itself.

For Malaysia, energy independence will not come from one single solution. It requires a mix of technologies – from solar and hydro to flexible gas and possibly nuclear – supported by strong institutions and transpar-

ent governance. Most importantly, it demands collective responsibility.

This means:

- > Expanding renewables while investing in storage and grid resilience;
- > Improving energy efficiency in households and industries;
- > Communicating policies clearly and enforcing them consistently; and
- > Building public trust through transparency and accountability.

As we raise the Jalur Gemilang this National Day, let us remember that true independence is not only about past struggles but also about preparing for future challenges.

Ensuring energy sovereignty will be one of the defining tasks of our generation.

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