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Earth Day and Sabah's energy crisis

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SINCE 1970, Earth Day has been observed annually on April 22nd. In the Tuaran district, my People's Service Centre and the Tuaran Education District (PPD Tuaran) collaborated to celebrate Earth Day on April 25th.

Among the highlights was a collaborative effort with SESB, who generously contributed to the cause through their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative, manifesting in a meaningful tree planting campaign dubbed "One Student One Tree." PPD Tuaran boasts over 22,000 students, and together, we planted over 21,000 trees on that day.

The event is a constant reminder of the critical need for a global commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainable development practices.

I penned this short article to bring attention to this fundamental issue, hoping to spark a wider public discourse and raise greater awareness about this critical concern.

Let us start the discussion with the question, how may this global movement manifest itself in the verdant landscapes of Sabah, amidst our pressing energy challenges?

Like many regions worldwide, Sabah is heavily reliant on fossil fuels for its energy needs. The overreliance on non-renewable energy sources not only contributes to greenhouse gas emissions but also leaves the region vulnerable to fluctuations in global oil prices and supply disruptions.

However, the landscape of Sabah's energy sector is gradually evolving, there's a growing interest in renewable energy sources among consumers. This trend reflects a rising awareness of environmental impacts and a desire for sustainability that deserves recognition and support.

As the chairman of Sabah Electricity Sdn Bhd (SESB), I commend this growing interest in sustainable energy solutions, as it represents a crucial step towards reducing our carbon footprint and combating climate change.

Not to mention, the affordability and feasibility of constructing renewable energy sources, such as wind and solar power, have become increasingly apparent. This makes them not only environmentally responsible but also economically attractive options for utilities in Malaysia.

The potential for renewable energy to contribute to our energy mix is significant, offering a path towards greater energy sustainability and resilience.

However, while the momentum towards renewable energy is promising, it's essential to acknowledge the challenges and complexities involved in its widespread adoption. From regulatory considerations to infrastructure requirements, there are various factors that need to be addressed to fully harness the potential of renewables in Sabah and beyond.

One notable example of this shift is the partnership between Siemens Energy, a global leader in renewable energy solutions, and Malaysian stakeholders. The commitment to advancing hydrogen technology and grid infrastructure in Malaysia will herald a new era of collaboration in Sabah's energy sector.

Furthermore, Petrolia Nasional Bhd (Petronas) has joined hands in this endeavor, aiming to explore opportunities across the hydrogen chain. As emphasized in their statement, hydrogen presents a notable advantage by bolstering Malaysia's foothold in the expanding green energy

and renewables market.

Additionally, hydrogen presents pathways for decarbonizing critical sectors such as iron and steel, long-haul transport, and chemicals, thereby enhancing energy security and facilitating sustainable development.

Following this advancement closely, I wholeheartedly echo the sentiment expressed by the German company's representative regarding the critical role of the grid in decarbonisation efforts. Indeed, the grid serves as the backbone of our transition to a cleaner, more sustainable energy future.

As such, it is necessary that we prioritize grid modernisation to accommodate the growing adoption of renewables and ensure Malaysia's reliable and secure energy supply.

However, amidst the promise of renewable energy lies the stark reality of Sabah's energy deficit. Despite strides made by Sabah Electricity Sdn Bhd (SESB), the gap between supply and demand persists, posing a significant challenge to our energy security.

This situation distinguishes Sabah from other regions in Malaysia. While utilities like Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB) and Sarawak Energy Berhad (SEB) have succeeded in maintaining a reliable power supply, SESB continues to grapple with the challenge of meeting the power demand in both Sabah and the Federal Territory of Labuan.

Central to this issue is the discrepancy between the region's power generation capacity and its rapidly growing energy requirements. Despite ongoing efforts to enhance infrastructure and expand capacity, the demand for electricity consistently outpaces the available supply.

As a result, Sabah and Labuan face periodic shortages and disruptions in their power supply. This imbalance is further compounded by geographical constraints and logistical hurdles unique to Sabah's rugged terrain and scattered communities.

Additionally, the reliance on conventional fossil fuel-based power generation methods remains essential in Sabah due to the necessity of maintaining old plants that have been in operation for years.

This isn't an excuse to neglect the transition to green energy, rather, it's a stark reminder of the obstacles we've grappled with for years.

While significant strides have been made in advancing our energy initiatives, I extend a humble invitation to consumers to actively engage in this journey. Empower yourself by staying informed about energy matters, particularly those pertaining to Sabah, which are diligently addressed by our sole energy utility company, SESB.

These weekly publications are not merely for the sake of discourse but are aimed at providing transparent insights into our energy landscape. By staying informed, consumers play a pivotal role in shaping the direction of our energy policies and projects.

Your involvement is crucial, especially when it comes to vital decisions regarding power supply, such as proposals for new power plants.

In the past, we have witnessed instances where lack of consumer support has hindered progress. Let us collectively ensure that future proposals receive the backing they need to move forward.