



30 MAR, 2026

## Power sector's fossil fuel dependence blunts environmental benefits

The Sun, Malaysia



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**PETALING JAYA:** Even as Malaysians switch to electric vehicles (EVs), the country's dependence on fossil fuels for electricity means the move may do little to cut greenhouse gas emissions, environmental experts say.

RimbaWatch director Adam Farhan said EVs could only deliver meaningful climate benefits if Malaysia shifts its energy mix away from coal and fossil gas.

He cited the group's January report, "The Contribution of Malaysia's Automotive Sector to Climate Change", which found that EVs in Peninsular Malaysia produce more emissions than conventional petrol and diesel cars when full life cycle emissions are considered.

"On average, internal combustion engine vehicles emit about 166gCO<sub>2</sub>e/km while EVs here reach around 181gCO<sub>2</sub>e/km.

"This is largely because nearly 80% of our electricity still comes from fossil fuels."

The picture improves in regions with cleaner energy.

In Sarawak, where renewables account for roughly 60% of electricity generation, EV emissions drop sharply to just 68gCO<sub>2</sub>e/km.

"This demonstrates that EVs can only make a meaningful dent in emissions if Malaysia commits to phasing out fossil fuels from the power sector."

Adam said national policies, including the National Energy Transition Roadmap, continue to prioritise fossil gas, potentially undermining decarbonisation efforts across energy and transport sectors.

On whether EVs could reduce urban heat in Malaysian cities, he noted that the impact would be minimal.

"EVs produce less heat than conventional vehicles due to higher efficiency, but the main culprit for urban heat is poor city planning and the replacement of green spaces with asphalt.

"Effective solutions require more greenery and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, not just cleaner vehicles."

However, EVs do offer other environmental benefits, particularly in reducing air and noise pollution.

Adam cited a joint study by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air and Greenpeace Malaysia, which found that air pollution contributes to an estimated 32,000 premature deaths annually and economic losses of RM303 billion each year.

He emphasised that EV adoption should complement, not replace, public transport, calling for a comprehensive national strategy to enhance connectivity, including better first and last-mile solutions in urban, suburban and rural areas.

"This should include the rapid expansion of buses, trams and emerging options such as autonomous rapid transit."

Adam also urged the government to commit to phasing out coal and fossil gas from the national grid by 2050, adding that without these measures, EV adoption alone would fail to deliver significant emissions reductions.

He raised concerns over the growing popularity of large electric SUVs, which consume more resources to manufacture and operate.

He proposed a tiered annual tax to discourage oversized models.

- 🚗 EVs below 1,500kg: RM500
- 🚗 EVs 1,500kg–1,800kg: RM1,500
- 🚗 EVs above 1,800kg: RM3,000

He also suggested introducing congestion charges in city centres with strong public transport.

"Without the right policies in place, EV adoption risks replicating existing transport challenges rather than solving them."

— BY **KIRTINEE RAMESH**