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Energy-efficient way to bigger profits

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NUCLEAR engineer Dr Mohd Zamzam Jaafar takes his energy very seriously. As chief executive officer of newly-launched Malaysia Energy Centre, he firmly believes that energy efficiency is a healthy practice.

And as health is wealth, the potential savings alone is enough justification for businesses to embark on energy efficiency projects.

That's where the centre comes in. It was set up last year with the aim of becoming the focal point of industry, universities, research institutions, and other national and international organisations.

It will also act as a national energy research centre to co-ordinate projects on energy efficiency and lead-manage renewable energy schemes.

One of these is an industrial energy efficiency improvement project which kicked off early this month.

"We tell them, if you really care to look at your factory, you can actually make a 10 per cent savings with a little investment. Energy-efficient projects make good business sense as they offer opportunities to improve profitability," points out Zamzam.

The four-year RM80 million project is targeted at eight energy-intensive industrial sub-sectors, namely cement, ceramics, food, glass, iron and steel, pulp and paper, rubber and wood.

The United Nations Development Programme/UN Global Environmental Facility gave RM29 million while the Government contributed RM24 million. The balance came from the Malaysian Electricity Supply Industry Trust Account.

The project will be managed by the centre and at the end of its tenure, it is estimated that green-house gases will be reduced by 10 per cent.

This (the appeal to the profit motive) is one of two ways the Government intends to push industry into adopting green technology, the other being legal compliance.

"By having regulations you create compliance, after that market forces take over," he says.

The centre's other mandate is research on renewable energy projects. This cause received a huge boost from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed who announced at the World Renewable Energy Congress Congress in June that the country desired to expand Malaysia's four-fuel policy to include renewable energy.

But, discloses Zamzam, the centre has already done work on its viability and has in fact collaborated with three research institutions on several experimental projects.

For example, the centre had signed a memorandum of understanding with Tenaga Nasional Research Development, Petronas Research and Scientific Services and SIRIM to develop, among others, energy from solar, wind, biomass and photovoltaic cells.

Some of these projects are in the shape of biomass - and municipal landfill gas-fuelled power plants, which include the testing and promotion of electric vehicles.

Zamzam sees a huge potential in harnessing renewable energy from solar and biomass, especially the latter.

"Biomass energy, generated from the burning of household waste, not only gets rid of garbage but also provides fuel to generate electricity."

These are reasons why giant power utility TNB and national oil company Petronas, like their foreign counterparts, are jumping on the renewable

energy bandwagon.

But can green energy be the sole solution to the world's impending energy crisis? Zamzam has reservations.

He says renewable energy is more suitable to power small and medium industries rather than as replacement for the other fuels.

"It is more to work in tandem rather than to be an outright substitute."

Zamzam is certain of one thing, though. "The Malaysia Energy Centre is here to stay."

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