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Mahathir-Energy

MALAYSIA TO STUDY INCORPORATING RENEWABLE ENERGY IN ITS FUEL STRATEGY

KUALA LUMPUR, June 8 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that Malaysia will study the merits of expanding its current four-fuel strategy by incorporating renewable energy as safe fuel.

He said the next five-year national development plan, the Eighth Malaysia Plan, would identify appropriate implementation strategy for the development and utilisation of renewable energy sources as an important component of Malaysia's total energy mix.

Currently, the success of the four-fuel strategy, that includes oil, gas, hydro and coal was obvious in the electricity sector as shown by the high growth electricity consumption over the last two decades, he said when opening the World Renewable Energy Congress, here.

"In fact, this congress comes at the most opportune time as we assess our national energy policy towards developing a more sustainable energy system," he said.

Dr Mahathir said today, environmentally friendlier gas accounted for over 70 per cent of the country's total electricity generation.

"However, too much reliance on gas is obviously not wise in the long term. We have to fall back on truly renewable energy source such as hydro because as I have pointed out, we cannot get something for nothing," he said.

He said hydro power required some sacrifice in terms of deforestation.

However, he said, Malaysia was 70 per cent covered by forest and tree plantation and the actual areas to be cleared would not affect this percentage much.

"Yet, the electricity generation is less polluting than even gas," he said.

Speaking to reporters later, Dr Mahathir said the time had come for emphasis on renewable energy sources as more and more sophisticated technology could be utilised.

"At the exhibition just now, I was shown a solar panel that lights up lamps. A complete set costs US\$100 (RM380) and there is no additional expenditure...a free source of energy," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that another solar panel which attracted his attention was one which could provide electricity during the day and the energy could be later deposited in the grid.

"At night, it could be used again to light lamps. The expenditure for energy used is cancelled off...if used in the villages for instance...," he said.

In his speech, Dr Mahathir said the government had established the Malaysia Energy Centre to promote and coordinate efforts to begin pre-commercialisation demonstration projects to evaluate the economic viability and ease of implementation of more promising renewable energy technologies.

He said the centre would play an important role to bridge research and development (R & D) and commercialisation of renewable energy technologies with international organisations to build the necessary capacity to implement market-oriented renewable energy and energy efficiency programmes.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was also keen to set up a regional network for education, training and information dissemination for renewable energy.

He said energy was vital to human progress but there was a cost that

was not confined to just finance in order to make it available for human development.

"The more important cost is the effect of energy generation on the environment. We can at least reduce the cost, not so much in monetary terms but more in terms of the effect on the environment," he said.

He said at the Rio Summit in 1992, it was agreed that the rich must contribute towards the poor countries in order that they would not cut down their trees and others to develop their countries and their people.

"But as we all know, the contribution is not forthcoming. Yet their environmentalists, particularly their NGOs, are relentless in their condemnation and action against those who have little choice but to exploit their few natural resources," the prime minister said.

He said poor countries and even middle-income countries have a duty to develop and bring a better life to their people.

He said while debates on which fuel was most sustainable for a better lifestyle was going on, the United Nations statistics show that more than 2.4 billion people in developing countries did not have any access to commercial energy.

"This means that almost 40 per cent of the world's population has inadequate energy for basic needs. This will impede development and progress...when we speak of sustainable development, we must also think of equity," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the best assurance of energy supply security and sustainability was to develop and use the country's own energy resources.

He said on this basis, indigenous renewable energy sources could be easily justified but they must be at reasonable cost as higher cost would not interest industry and business leaders.

Dr Mahathir said developed countries must recognise the need for developing countries to have access to renewable energy technologies at subsidised or at least affordable prices.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir and his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, arrived at the Palace of the Golden Horses, the venue of the congress, by driving an electric car.

Malaysia is hosting the congress as an activity of the World Solar Programme 1996-2005, which is an initiative of the World Solar Commission (WSC) aimed at promoting the development, adoption and wider utilisation of renewable energy sources globally.

Some 300 participants, including from various public and private sector agencies within the country, are taking part in the four-day event.

Dr Mahathir, who is a member of the WSC, also flagged off the central leg of the Malaysian International Solar Cycle Challenge (MISCC).

MISCC, another international event in renewable energy, is organised by Universiti Teknologi Malaysia with participants from Malaysia, Germany, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and others.

The prime minister also launched the Energy Centre of Malaysia. Among its main objectives are to promote energy efficiency and develop R & D in new and renewable sources of energy in the country.

Winners in the National Schools Poster Competition on the Promotion of Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency in the country also received their prizes at the ceremony.

Dr Mahathir also visited the International Renewable Energy Exhibition held in conjunction with the congress.

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