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Plan to study merits of renewable energy

Patvinder Singh

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today told an international congress of Malaysia's plan to study the merits of adding renewable energy to the country's current four-fuel strategy.

He said the congress came at a most opportune time as Malaysia assessed its National Energy Policy towards developing a more sustainable national energy system.

"The next five-year development plan, the Eighth Malaysia Plan, will identify appropriate strategies for the development and utilisation of renewable energy sources as an important component of our total energy mix.

"As a unique domestic resource, recurring savings from energy efficiency programmes will also qualify as renewable energy," he said, adding that currently the success of the four-fuel strategy of oil, gas, hydro and coal was obvious in the electricity sector as shown in the high growth in power consumption over the last two decades.

Dr Mahathir said this at the opening of the World Renewable Energy Congress 1999 which has the theme "Research, Development and Commercialisation of Renewable Energy". The congress is being held to promote the introduction, diffusion, development and efficient applications of economic renewable energy technologies.

A total of 329 participants from 44 countries are taking part in the four-day congress being held for the first time in Asia.

WREC '99 Malaysia is organised by the Ministry of Energy, Communications and Multimedia with the co-operation of other public and private agencies, universities and local non-governmental organisations.

"Admittedly, we cannot get something for nothing. And so we cannot get energy without paying a price, in terms of finance and in terms of environmental degradation," he said, adding that the cost could be reduced, not so much in monetary terms but in terms of the effect on the environment.

"We really cannot blame the poor from cutting down timber to burn for their energy needs. They cannot be expected to freeze to death or to eat uncooked food because the rich object to trees being cut and smoke from wood-burning to pollute the environment," Dr Mahathir said.

He said priorities should therefore be right and that if it was felt that even the poor should not pollute the environment, then the rich should be prepared to pay for them.

"At the Rio Summit in 1992, we agreed that the rich must contribute towards the poor countries in order that they will not cut down their trees, etc, 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."

Dr Mahathir said environment-friendlier gas accounted for more than 70 per cent of the country's total electricity generation but that too much reliance on gas was obviously not wise in the long term.

"We have to fall back on truly renewable energy sources like hydro," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Government had established the Malaysia Energy Centre to promote and coordinate concerted efforts among public and

private sectors to begin pre-commercialisation demonstration projects to evaluate the economic viability and ease of implementation of the more promising renewable energy technologies.

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