



A worker inspects car batteries at a factory for Xinwangda Electric Vehicle Battery Co Ltd, which makes lithium batteries for electric cars and other uses, in Nanjing, China. — AFP photos



A coal-fired power plant in Indonesia. The substantial emissions associated with battery manufacturing challenges the notion of EVs as an environmental panacea.

Fuelling a 'green' economy with 'grey' energy?



Exploring Sustainable Development

with Dr. Goh Chun Sheng

THE news of the war spreading to Russia's border was shocking. Al Jazeera's latest report states that the Belgorod region has faced intensified attacks since late May.

The Russia-Ukraine war has had far-reaching impacts on every aspect of our lives. Both countries are major exporters of fossil energy and global grain suppliers. Since the war started, the cost of living has been steadily rising, directly affecting ordinary people across the world.

The war has also reshaped the global geopolitical landscape, with Norway serving as a remarkable example. The discovery of oil in Norway in 1969 marked the beginning of the country's involvement in the oil and gas industry.

Today, Norway is one of the world's largest oil and gas exporter. However, with the increasing prominence

of climate change, Norway maintained a broad political consensus to address the potential climate risks associated with investing in new oil extraction.

Unfortunately, the spike in oil prices following the pandemic and the onset of the war have dampened discussions on phasing out oil and gas production in Norwegian energy policy. Instead, Oslo has been urged to expand its oil and gas production to protect Europe's energy security.

At the same time, Norway has reaped substantial financial benefits from this approach. The government estimated that oil and gas revenues contributed \$125 billion to the country in 2022, approximately \$100 billion more than in 2021.

The war has also had implications for the coal export policy of Indonesia, the world's top thermal coal exporter. In January 2022, the country temporarily banned coal exports to mitigate the risk of power loss and blackouts due to critically low coal supplies at domestic power plants.

However, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia reignited a surge in coal prices, leading Indonesia to resume coal flows to global markets. As reported by Reuters, citing Kpler's figures, its coal exports reached almost 500 million tonnes in 2022.

Energy paradox in Borneo

Many Malaysians may not be aware of the extent of our country's heavy reliance on coal. Between 2000 and 2020, Malaysia's electricity generation from coal has tripled from around 7,700 GWh (about 11 per cent) to over 85,000 GWh (47 per cent) as reported by International Energy Agency (IEA). Most of this coal comes from Borneo, specifically East and South Kalimantan, if we look carefully into the trade data.

Even Sarawak, famous for its hydropower, still relies on coal. It has an available coal power capacity of 1,000 MW in 2019, as reported by Energy Commission in Malaysia Energy Statistics Handbook 2020.

Both Malaysia and Indonesia, heavily dependent on coal, find themselves caught in an energy paradox. Despite their aspirations to develop 'green' economies, including several large projects in their Bornean territories, the path to achieving this remains unclear.

North Kalimantan has become the focal point, with President Joko Widodo's ambition to establish the nation's largest 'green' industrial plant for battery production and electric vehicles, leveraging investments and technologies from Korean and Chinese companies. The solution proposed by

Jokowi's administration involves the construction of mega hydropower plants, with ongoing discussions surrounding the overall sustainability of such projects.

Further to the North, the Malaysian counterpart, Sabah, lacks a clear answer to this dilemma. Recent investments from Korea and China in the Malaysian state primarily focus on 'green' industries, encompassing the production of components in EV batteries and solar panels. The Korea Economy Daily reported in January 2021 that "the Malaysian city's (Kota Kinabalu) large-scale electricity generation facility, required to produce copper foils, and about half an electricity price compared to South Korea led SKC to choose the coastal city."

However, this seems highly unrealistic considering the recent power shortage issues in Sabah and its limited energy production capacity. According to the same Energy Commission report, the available capacity in Sabah is only 1,235 MW, four times lower than in Sarawak. Per capita, the state's capacity is about 2.5 times lower than the peninsula's.

Producing EV batteries and solar panels with coal power?

Rowan Atkinson, widely known as 'Mr Bean' — a comedian with a Master's

Degree in Electrical Engineering from Oxford — expressed his disappointment in electric vehicles' environmental claims in an article published in The Guardian on June 3, 2023.

The article highlights the substantial emissions associated with battery manufacturing, challenging the notion of EVs as an environmental panacea. Constructing new coal power plants in Borneo to manufacture components for batteries, solar panels or any other so-called 'green' products will ironically undermine the very essence of 'green' industries or economies, turning the whole development plan a comedy reminiscent of Mr Bean but, unfortunately, a disheartening one.

The real challenge for Malaysia and Indonesia, as well as specifically for Borneo, lies in phasing out 'grey' energy from the economy for both domestic use and export. For Indonesia, the situation is somewhat similar to the energy paradox faced by Norway. The Nordic country has been utilising hydropower domestically, investing revenues in conservation projects (it is the largest donor for REDD+ of which Central Kalimantan was designated as a major site) while continuing drilling and exporting fossil energy.

The International Monetary

Fund (IMF) has proposed a solution to address Norway's energy paradox, suggesting that the country should more actively use oil and gas revenues to assist other nations in meeting climate change goals.

However, the effectiveness of such a proposal is questionable without a concrete plan to phase out fossil fuels. By no means the climate crisis can be resolved if significant greenhouse gas emissions from burning fossil fuels continue.

While many questions require in-depth technical scrutiny and careful economic considerations, one thing is evident: there is nothing for us to be proud of in developing 'green' industries or pursuing similar initiatives if we continue relying on 'grey' energy, whether directly or indirectly.

It will likely do more harm than good in both environmental and financial terms.

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His book, Transforming Borneo: From Land Exploitation to Sustainable Development, was published by ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore in March 2023.

DPM proposes for upgrading works on Kampung Tunku community hall

KUCHING: Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Fadillah Yusof has proposed for the upgrading works on the community hall at Kampung Tunku in Samariang constituency so as to accommodate the needs of the local community.

In this regard, he said he had mentioned this suggestion to Kuching North City Commission (DBKU) director Mohamed Khaidir Abang, adding that the upgrading works should also include installation of air-conditioning units and decking.

"Therefore, I would like to call upon the JKKK (village security and development committee) to submit to DBKU their proposal on (cost) estimation for the upgrading works, as soon as possible.

"It is hoped that once upgraded the hall could be used



Join Unity Govt to develop country, Fadillah calls on PN

KUCHING: Deputy Prime Minister Dato Sri Fadillah Yusof has suggested for the Perikatan Nasional (PN) to join the Unity Government to together develop Malaysia as one united nation.

He told reporters this Saturday when asked to comment on PN election director Datuk Seri Muhammad Sanusi Md Nor's criticism of the Unity Government.

Sanusi, who is Kedah Menteri Besar, had recently claimed that people were disappointed with the performance of the unity government.

In this regard, Fadillah urged Sanusi and the rest of PN members to join the Unity Government in developing the country rather than just criticising.

"Our country needs political stability. With political stability

we can focus on developing our country and restoring our economy. Doing too much politicking will only affect the growth and economy of our country. Let us be united as one country, enough with this politicking," he said when met after officiating at 'Pesta Samariang' in Kampung Tunku community hall here.

Fadillah added that every citizen had the right to express their views on the performance of the federal government.

He also said the people remained an important factor in determining such effectiveness.

"In the context of the unity government, what is important is our commitment to unite the people because through unity we can bring develop our country and recover its economy," he said.

SFC, Unimas to conduct research on effects of climate change on amphibians

not only for villagers to play badminton in, but also to house events such as engagements or weddings, as well as various activities for the community," said the Petra Jaya MP in his speech for the closing ceremony of 'Pesta Samariang 2023' at Kampung Tunku community hall Saturday.

Organised by Kejiranan Mesra (KJM) N7 Samariang, the event's key objective was to foster closer relationship among members of the local community.

"A good relationship is not only able to establish close cooperation, but also able to



Fadillah (second right) and Sharifah Hasidah gesture the thumbs-up sign after unveiling Pesta Samariang 2023 banners. With them on stage are (from right) Mohamed Khaidir, KJM Kampung Tunku chairman Saiduddin Senawi and Zamahari.

enhance the sense of belonging so that our area would always be well taken care of, and we can live in a state of peace and prosperity always.

"God-willing, I will always be with all of you to ensure that this area is always in the best condition," said Fadillah.

Meanwhile, Deputy

Minister in Sarawak Premier's Department (Law, Malaysia Agreement 1963 and State-Federal Relations) Datuk Sharifah Hasidah Sayeed Aman Ghazali commended KJM N7 Samariang for the good organisation of the annual event this year.

"Packed with various

exciting activities, this carnival would take place in Kampung Semariang Batu next year," said the Samariang assemblywoman.

Also present at the closing ceremony yesterday were Kuching Resident Fathi Hambali and event's organising chairman Zamahari Zaidi.

KUCHING: The Sarawak Forestry Corporation (SFC) will collaborate with Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) to conduct a research on the impact of climate change to amphibians.

SFC chief executive officer Zolkipli Mohamad Aton said the collaboration would focus on assessing the correlation of environment on amphibians' diversity pattern in Sarawak's totally protected area.

This project, funded by the National Conservation Trust Fund for Natural Resources, aims to identify environmental factors affecting amphibians and understand how short-term and

long-term variations, including climate change, impact species, populations and assemblages," he said at the launching ceremony of the 10th Unimas Bornean Frog Race at Sama Jaya Nature Reserve here, Saturday.

Zolkipli said through this joint-research, they hoped to gain valuable insight into the intricate relationships between the environment and the amphibian species in Sarawak's protected areas.

He said the 10th Bornean Frog Race, which had drawn about 90 participants, would also highlight frogs' crucial role in the ecosystem. — Bernama

