AUTHOR: No author available SECTION: LOCAL NEWS AUDIENCE : 38,902 PAGE: 15
PRINTED SIZE: 235.00cm² REGION: KL MARKET: Malaysia PHOTO: Full Color ASR: MYR 7,835
WORDS: 562 ITEM ID: DP0122396477



01 NOV, 2026

Time to get Asean Power Grid off the ground

New Sunday Times, Malaysia

PRIORITY PROJECT

Time to get Asean Power Grid off the ground

ASEAN is a year shy of its 60th birthday. As happens each November, it will gather — this time in the Philippines — for a pageant of summitry where not just regional luminaries but global leaders, including United States President Donald Trump, will show up.

Warding off geopolitical tensions was what Asean was originally set up to undertake and today, that remains its primary raison d'etre — although today's geopolitical challenges have changed as the rivalry animating global politics now mostly revolves around the Sino-US relationship as opposed to the US-Soviet one before.

But while geopolitics — as it involves our region — can at best be managed, Asean has too often been so pre-occupied with it that it tends to neglect other equally serious matters.



JOHN TEO

Take economic integration, for example.

The combined population of Asean can rival that of the European Union (EU) and is, therefore, a very attractive proposition if efforts towards creating an EU-like common market can move beyond fits and starts, the establishment of the Asean Free Trade Area notwithstanding.

Yet, even a more focused economically driven idea, such as talk of the Asean Power Grid (APG), has barely moved beyond mere talk.

"It is now time to move the ambition into action", Deputy Prime Minister and Energy Transition and Water Transformation Minister Datuk Seri Fadillah Yusof said in his keynote address in Singapore early last week.

The 44th Asean Ministers on Energy meeting in Manila earlier reaffirmed the commitment to enhance regional connectivity.

Fadillah had said the APG was viewed by Malaysia not just as infrastructure, but also a strategic connection for the region's energy security and prosperity.

Malaysia, in particular Sarawak, has a clear interest in promoting APG in view of our position as an energy-exporting country.

Yet the proposal for Sarawak to export its mostly renewable energy to Singapore is being delayed if not altogether stalled.

So what would it take for the APG to be turned into reality?

Earlier this year, Singapore Energy Interconnections chief executive officer Ong Teng Kun told a Kuala Lumpur conference that the challenge for APG now was implementation of the various memoranda of understanding, working groups on policy, technical and regulatory matters and frameworks for subsea power cables and renewable energy certificates.

The harder task now was to identify projects that could secure financing, obtain approvals and deliver on actual power flows across borders.

So far, Sarawak has successfully accomplished the interconnection to West Kalimantan and is working with Brunei on a similar arrangement.

This holds the promise of the Borneo grid being expanded and forming the nucleus for the APG.

With the development of energy-intensive data centres in the region all the rage, the regional thirst for energy is unmistakable.

While the economic imperatives for the APG are clear, as with almost all things Asean, the collective political will must be summoned.

Where regional governments need to come in is in providing the crucial backstop, reducing risks inherent in cross-border power infrastructure so that commercial energy supply and demand arrangements can proceed.

Perhaps the APG can be adopted by Asean as the priority project underpinning regional economic integration?

The writer views developments in the nation, region and the wider world from his vantage point in Kuching

Provided for client's internal research purposes only. May not be further copied, distributed, sold or published in any form without the prior consent of the copyright owner.