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# Understanding the role of IPPs

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# Understanding the role of IPPs

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INDEPENDENT Power Producers (IPPs) play a critical role in ensuring a stable power supply for Sabah. As I have emphasized numerous times, this is due to Sabah Electricity Sdn Bhd (SESB) having limited self-generation capabilities and heavily relying on power produced by IPPs.

This power is then bought and sold to us, the consumers. But what does it mean when these IPPs have no choice but to cease operation for scheduled maintenance or even due to unforeseen sudden problems? Scheduled maintenance can be best understood as analogous to car maintenance.

Just as cars need regular servicing to prevent breakdowns, power plants require scheduled maintenance to ensure smooth and uninterrupted operation. This proactive approach helps address potential issues before they escalate, thereby preventing prolonged power outages. Consider a situation shared by one of the IPPs in Sabah.

They had requested a deferment of their scheduled maintenance, which would have meant they wouldn't supply power for about two weeks. However, given the rising demand for electricity, SESB deemed the deferment implausible. Unfortunately, this decision led to a more severe outcome.

The minor issue that needed attention deteriorated into a major problem. Instead of the planned 18 days of downtime for maintenance, the plant was out of operation for seven months due to the worsened condition.

This not only disrupted power supply significantly but also highlighted the critical importance of timely maintenance. Unforeseen issues, on the other hand, can arise without warning and can severely disrupt power supply.

While scheduled maintenance is planned and can be managed with backup strategies, unforeseen problems require immediate attention and can be more challenging to resolve. These can be due to technical failures, natural disasters, or other unpredictable events.

In such cases, the collaboration between SESB and IPPs becomes even more vital. Ensuring rapid response and repair can mitigate the impact on consumers. Additionally, having a robust infrastructure and contingency plans in place can help manage these sudden disruptions more effectively.

Wear and tear are inevitable in any mechanical system, and diagnosing issues in power plants is particularly complex. For example, in Malaysia, there is only one borescope inspector, a specialist whose expertise is critical for these maintenance operations.

The borescope inspection involves using a specialized camera to look inside engines and turbines, identifying wear and tear that isn't visible from the outside.

This process is essential for spotting potential issues before they lead to serious damage. Apart from that, shutting down a power plant isn't about just addressing a single issue but tackling multiple potential problems.

A comprehensive shutdown allows for the inspection and repair of various components, from turbines to cooling systems. This requires the coordination of over 100 staff for minor works and up to 300 for major ones.

The logistical challenges are immense, requiring careful planning and execution to ensure that all necessary work is completed efficiently.

Additionally, factors like weather and the availability of specialized personnel further complicate these operations.

For instance, heavy rains can delay outdoor maintenance work, while a shortage of skilled workers can extend the downtime. Coordinating such large-scale operations is a Herculean task, often involving months of preparation and planning.

To illustrate the impact of maintenance delays, an IPP in Sabah shared that a maintenance work delays last year resulted in the power plant losing about 4.2 MW.

This loss is equivalent to about five rental generator sets from SESB, highlighting how timely maintenance could have averted such significant power deficits.

While these technical details might


seem overwhelming, it's essential for us, as consumers, to understand the broader picture.

Maintenance shutdowns are not haphazard decisions but are meticulously planned and executed, considering numerous factors to minimize disruptions and ensure a stable power supply.

Transparency is key to fostering trust and patience among the public. As consumers, we must appreciate the complexity and necessity of IPP operations and maintenance.

While the inconvenience of a power shutdown is frustrating, the long-term benefits of scheduled maintenance far outweigh the short-term disruptions. Understanding this can help us be more supportive and patient during these necessary downtimes.

Scheduled maintenance, despite its temporary inconveniences, is a vital part of ensuring a reliable power supply. By understanding the intricacies involved in these processes, we can better appreciate the work that goes into keeping our lights on and our devices running.

Let's acknowledge the dedication and expertise of those who work tirelessly behind the scenes to power our lives.