



10 MAY, 2024

Annual loss of RM140m due to electricity theft

The Sun, Malaysia



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► Cases persist despite installation of smart meters and increased penalty of RM1 million fine or 10 years' jail, says TNB

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PETALING JAYA: Tenaga Nasional Bhd (TNB) has told *theSun* that 7,559 cases of meter installation tampering were recorded from January to March.

"There were 33,698 cases detected in 2022, 3,045 in 2021 and 29,710 in 2020. Despite the installation of smart meters in 2016, persisting cases signal a concerning trend in the country's energy landscape," said a TNB spokesman.

He said in 2015, the Energy Commission Electricity Supply (Amendment) Act updated the penalties for tampering with electrical installations or equipment to enhance service quality and safety in the electricity sector.

The revised Act changed the penalty from a RM100,000 fine or five years' jail to a RM1 million fine or 10 years' jail.

However, he said the implementation of such stringent penalties had little effect as TNB reported an annual loss of approximately RM140 million due to unauthorised modification or manipulation of electricity meters, which allows consumers to underreport usage and evade accurate billing.

"Such activities pose significant financial losses to utility companies and compromise the integrity of the energy supply system."

The spokesman said a surge in cases was observed after the installation of smart meters that can detect and trace electricity tampering.

"Smart meters automatically record electricity usage and transmit data to TNB via radio frequencies for real-time monitoring and billing, identifying irregularities or tampering faster than conventional meters.

"(TNB uses) remote monitoring, load profiling, data analytics, tamper detection and other methods, but defrauders try to outwit us with more advanced technology."

He highlighted a need for collaborative efforts to address the issue, adding that investigations of electricity theft on premises mining cryptocurrency found they caused TNB losses of up to RM250,000.

"One company that was involved in cryptocurrency mining activities for the past three years caused TNB to lose between RM30,000 and RM40,000 a month at each of



Smart meters automatically record electricity usage and transmit data to TNB via radio frequencies for real-time monitoring and billing, while identifying tampering cases. – PIC COURTESY OF TNB

its premises."

He said during an operation conducted by the Seremban district police headquarters and TNB, power was disrupted at 12 premises around Seremban, including a two-storey terrace house, after the occupants were found to be involved in online gambling.

He also said despite these measures, the individuals persisted in their activities.

"Electricity supply to the premises was permanently severed under Section 21A (1) of the Common Gaming Houses Act 1966 to eliminate the problem."

Illegal electricity connections used to carry out cryptocurrency activities compromise the integrity and stability of the electricity supply and risk system breakdowns and fires.

The spokesman said the company is collaborating with other authorities to address electricity theft.

"Joint raids conducted with the Energy

Commission, Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission, police and local councils have increased detection of meter tampering cases.

"TNB's enhanced surveillance efforts have played a crucial role in identifying and addressing instances of electricity theft."

He said TNB has a zero-tolerance policy towards any employees involved in illegal activities and would dismiss them as a consequence, adding that the company's efforts have mitigated losses due to electricity theft and ensured the security and reliability of electricity supply for the public.

"Public awareness and support are crucial in combating electricity theft. We urge the public to remain vigilant and report suspicious activities.

"Together, we can uphold the integrity of our electricity supply and protect public interest."