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Long-term plan to boost Sabah's energy, water security: Akmal

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Sabah and Federal governments are working to formulate a long-term plan to strengthen the State's energy and water security, said Deputy Minister of Energy Transition and Water Transformation, Akmal Nasrullah Mohd Nasir (pic).



The plan involves several major initiatives, beginning with the acceleration of natural gas exploration along Sabah's east coast by Petronas to ensure a more affordable and sustainable fuel supply for future power generation plants.

The second initiative involves a feasibility study on developing Small Modular Reactors (SMR) as a medium- and long-term alternative energy source. The study will look into policy, regulatory and risk assessment aspects, as well as technology selection and human capital development.

The third focuses on strengthening cross-border grid connections through collaboration between Sabah Electricity Sdn Bhd (SE), the Asean Centre for Energy (ACE) and Indonesia's PLN.

A feasibility study is being conducted on the proposed interconnection between Sabah and North Kalimantan, aimed at improving regional energy resilience.

Akmal was responding to Sandakan MP Vivian Wong during a recent Special Chamber session in the Dewan Rakyat concerning delays in energy and water infrastructure development in Sabah.

He said since the transfer of energy regulatory authority to the Sabah Government in 2024, the Federal Government has remained committed to providing RM3.54 billion in electricity subsidies until 2030.

This includes subsidies for fuel, solar, tariffs and renewable energy.

At the same time, the Sabah Government has included the 275kV Southern Link project under the 13th Malaysia Plan (RMK13) Rolling Plan.

The Federal Government will provide development loans to support its implementation to help strengthen the state's power grid stability.

Akmal added that both governments would also implement several new energy and storage projects along Sabah's east coast.

These include an 86MW Phase 1 solar project expected to be completed next year bringing total solar capacity to 127MW, and a Phase 2 solar project with a capacity of up to 250MW, which is expected to go to tender this year.

Other key projects include a 200MW/400MWh Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) scheduled to be operational in 2027, a 160MW floating LNG power plant targeted for completion in 2028, a 141MW hydropower plant in Lahad Datu expected to be operational in 2031, and a geothermal energy project in Tawau with an estimated potential of 100MW, planned for tender in 2026.

Akmal also disclosed that the Federal Government has approved RM2.9 billion in loans to assist Sabah in implementing 16 water supply projects.

These projects include the construction and upgrading of water treatment plants, water source studies, and the implementation of a Non-Revenue Water (NRW) Reduction Programme with an allocation of RM87.1 million.

Wong urged the government to take systematic and immediate action to address the delays in developing energy and water infrastructure in Sabah.

She said continuous rainfall along the west coast had recently triggered landslides that claimed 12 lives and displaced more than 3,000 residents.

"The landslide in Kolopis, Penampang caused a high-voltage transmission tower to collapse, resulting in a large-scale power outage across Sabah's east coast that affected over 1.5 million residents," she said.

"The blackout also disrupted operations at military camps, naval bases, airport radar systems and hospitals, posing a serious threat to national security," she added.

Vivian called on the government to expedite the Southern Grid Link (Southern Transmission Line Project), construct a power plant of at least 300 megawatts on the east coast, and develop a comprehensive long-term energy and water security plan to prevent similar incidents in the future.