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Stop the theft of electricity in Sabah

Sabah Electricity Sdn Bhd (SESB) recently revealed that it loses about RM210 million per year as a result of electricity theft. This translates into about 7% of electricity generated by the state utility company, its chairman Datuk Seri Wilfred Madius Tangau said.

To put things in perspective, he said 1% of electricity loss results in SESB incurring losses of RM30 million per year, which at 7% causes SESB to suffer losses of RM210 million per year. And this loss of RM210 mil-

lion per year comes while SESB is getting RM850 million a year in subsidies for electricity.

SESB is 83% held by national utility giant Tenaga Nasional Bhd, with the remainder 17% under the Sabah government, while the Minister of Finance Inc has a golden share.

To be fair, the theft of electricity in Sabah is not something new, and news reports going back 20 years or more have highlighted such theft, but the figures were usually much lower. In February last year, a SESB official had come out to say that RM20 million a year is lost to theft of electricity.

Companies Commission of Malaysia data shows that SESB chalked up a net profit of RM83.29 million on revenue of RM2.56 billion for the financial year ended Dec 31, 2022 (FY2022). This is the lowest profit in five years while revenue has been more or less consistent, gradually increasing from RM2.15 billion in FY2018 to RM2.56 billion in FY2022.

SESB's net profit was RM174.37 million in FY2018, RM233.01 million in FY2019, RM266.78 million in FY2020 and RM416.88 million FY2021, which indicate a sharp drop in profit, possibly brought about by high levels of theft.

It is not clear if the theft includes meter tampering, illegal power connections and the like, which news reports in November last year have reported as being in the region of RM5 million a year in value.

Something should have been done years ago, when the problem of theft of electricity in Sabah first reared its ugly head, but perhaps it's better late than never.