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Sarawak aims to become regional power supplier

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KUCHING: Sarawak targets to significantly raise power generation capacity to 15 gigawatts (GW) in 10 years to expand the state's electricity exports to more Asean member countries.

According to Sarawak Premier Tan Sri Abang Johari Tun Openg, Sarawak is expected to produce 10GW of power by 2030 and increase it by another 50% to 15GW by 2035.

"The installed capacity of Sarawak is currently 5GW. So, what are we going to do with the balance?"

"We will sell them to our neighbouring countries," he said at Affin Bank Bhd's Lunar New Year dinner here last week.

State-owned Sarawak Energy Bhd (SEB) currently has available electricity capacity of about 5,745 megawatt (MW) across Sarawak. The bulk of the generation capacity comes from renewable energy from hydroelectric dams – Bakun (2,400MW), Murum (944MW) and Batang Ai (108MW).

The Baleh dam project, currently under construction and scheduled for completion by 2028, would add another 1,285MW to SEB's generation capacity.

The state's biggest power consumers include energy-intensive industries such as aluminium and ferroalloy smelting plants in Bintulu's Samalaju Industrial Park.

Abang Johari had said that SEB would work to achieve generating 10GW of power through a mix of hydroelectric, solar and gas by 2030.

SEB's first 50MW solar floating farm, spanning 190ha on Batang Ai dam, also Malaysia's largest, was commissioned months ago.

The utility continues to explore the feasibility of a second phase of the solar project at Batang Ai dam, with a potential capacity of up to 160MW.

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To meet the keen interest shown by investors in Middle East and Europe on renewable and green energy projects, the Sarawak government has identified the Bakun and Murum dams, both in the upper Rejang basin in Kapit Division, central Sarawak, for the deployment of floating solar systems.

The solar system projects in Bakun and Murum have the potential to generate 500MW and 600MW, respectively.

In November 2024, SEB, Abu Dhabi Future Energy Bhd (PSJC) and global clean energy firm Gentari inked a trilateral joint study agreement to explore the feasibility of undertaking a floating solar project on Murum dam.

The parties are conducting a year-long joint study on the proposed project, targeting solar power generation of up to 1GW.

If implemented, Abang Johari said this

mega project would help Sarawak to achieve its goal of producing 10GW of power by 2030.

Last year, the Sarawak premier revealed that 19 ambassadors from the European Union (EU) were considering establishing the European Investment Bank to fund the development of renewable and green energy projects in Sarawak.

With a potential investment of €1bil, he said Sarawak could receive RM6bil to build more hydroelectric dams, supported by the EU's commitment to sustainable development. Based on studies in the 1980s, Sarawak has the potential to produce up to 20,000MW of hydroelectric power if more dams are built.

SEB continues to study the concept of cascading dams to generate electricity, similar to those in Sweden.

On exports of electricity, Abang Johari

said last week that Sarawak will add southern Philippines to SEB's export markets following a recent request by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim to sell electricity to the archipelago.

Sarawak will be exporting electricity to neighbouring Sabah by next year and from Sabah, any excess power will be transmitted to the southern Philippines.

Abang Johari said Sarawak will have excess electricity to be exported to Sabah and Brunei once the 500MW combined gas cycle gas turbine power plant in Miri, currently under construction, is ready in two years' time.

Another three gas plants with a combined generation capacity of 1,500MW will also be built in Bintulu.

He said Sabah has requested SEB to sell 100MW to its utility body initially, doubling the initial 50MW agreed earlier.

SEB, which has been exporting electricity to Pontianak in West Kalimantan, Indonesia, since 2016, also have plans to sell 1,000MW of renewable energy to Singapore via an undersea electricity transmission system to advance the Asean Power Grid.

"We are still in discussions on the construction method for the undersea cable. I anticipate that these discussions will be concluded within the first quarter of this year, followed by the potential signing of an agreement between Malaysia and Singapore," Abang Johari said this month.