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Sarawak set to export hydropower to Singapore

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Project to be done via submarine cables

ENERGY

By JACK WONG

KUCHING: Sarawak may export hydropower to Singapore via submarine cables linking Kuching and the island republic.

The proposed project has been actively pursued after Singapore expressed its keen interest to buy hydropower energy from Sarawak.

"Now we (Sarawak and Singapore authorities) are in the negotiation process and in early preparation on the deal.

"The first step is to carry out the undersea cable project's survey for the next 10 months," according to Sarawak Deputy Minister for Energy and Environmental Sustainability Dr Hazland Abang Hipni.

From the findings of the survey, he said both parties will further hold talks on the project which was discussed again during his meeting with Singapore Energy Market Authority (EMA) chief executive Ngiam Shin Chun here recently.

In April 2022, Sarawak Premier Tan Sri Abang Johari Tun Openg met with Singapore Trade and Industry Minister Gan Kim Yong and EMA officials on Sarawak-Singapore collaboration on renewable energy and hydrogen economy.

According to a media report later, state-owned Sarawak Energy Bhd (SEB) is part of a consortium with Sembcorp Industries (Singapore's leading energy and urban development player) and SP Group (a leading utilities group in Asia-Pacific) to conduct a feasibility study to explore the potential of power connections between Sarawak and Singapore.

Hazland said Singapore requires more energy supply for its industries and companies and Sarawak via SEB could provide the republic island with green and renewable energy generated by its major hydroelectric dams.

SEB owns the 2,400 megawatts (MW) Bakun dam, 944MW Murum dam and 108MW Batang Ai dam.

The 1,285MW Boleh dam, which is current-

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ly under construction, is expected to be commissioned by 2027.

The Bakun, Murum and Boleh dams are all located in the upper Rajang Basin in Kapit Division in central Sarawak.

Hazland said with the coming on stream of Boleh dam and other future energy projects, SEB is expected to raise its installed capacity to at least 8,000MW in the next six to seven years from the current about 5,800MW.

Sarawak has the potential to generate 20,000MW of hydropower if more dams are built.

Under a heads of agreement inked between SEB and Tenaga Nasional Bhd (TNB) in 2008, two submarine cables would be laid to connect Peninsular Malaysia and Sarawak for the export of Bakun hydropower to TNB.

The construction of the two submarine cables, which were supposed to be ready by 2016 and 2017 and each capable of transmitting 800MW, was however scrapped due to the project's high development cost.

Bakun dam, which was then held by Federal government-owned Sarawak Hiro Sdn Bhd, was acquired by SEB in 2017.

The Bakun power has been supplied to energy-intensive industries like aluminium and ferroalloy smelting plants in Samalaju Industrial Park, Bintulu set up under Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy.

Gan has said recently that Singapore plans to further reduce the carbon footprint of its power sector by importing about 30% of its

electricity from low-carbon sources such as renewable energy plants by 2035.

This move he added will allow Singapore which lacks access to most renewable energy options other than solar to tap sources such as hydropower and wind energy in other countries.

Gan described the discussion to buy green energy from Sarawak as an important project for Singapore to help decarbonise the island's power system and in line with the global world's commitment to zero-carbon emissions.

Saying that selling energy to Singapore will bring huge benefits to Sarawak, Hazland said Sarawak's plan to export electricity to Singapore is also in line with its big plan to connect countries through the Asean Grid.

Under the Borneo Grid, SEB has been exporting electricity to west Kalimantan, Indonesia since 2016, and it is expected to sell electricity to Sabah by 2024 when its northern grid extension project is completed.

A power exchange and interconnection agreement signed between Syarikat SESCO Bhd (wholly-owned by SEB) and Sabah Electricity Sdn Bhd in 2021 will pave the way for an initial export of 30MW for 15 years via a 31kms 275 kilovolts double circuit transmission line which will run from Lawas (Sarawak) to Mengalong (Sabah).

SEB also plans to export electricity to oil-rich Brunei Darussalam.