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Renewable support to continue



Anantaporn: Solar taking a back seat

Energy Minister Anantaporn Kanjanarat is committed to continued support for renewable energy projects, saying they could stimulate private investment of 120 billion baht over the next few years.

Gen Anantaporn said the government should focus on biomass, biogas and waste-to-energy projects that require less time to develop compared with other types of renewable energy.

"Thailand has plentiful resources, from agricultural waste and waste from the livestock industry to waste water from metropolitan waste treatment," he said.

"Since all of these can be used as fuels to generate power, it's a perfect match for us."

The newly appointed minister said solar energy would no longer be a focus, citing high investment costs that make solar less commercially viable than other sources.

According to the Alternative Energy Development Plan for 2015-36, Thailand will generate 5,570 megawatts of electricity from biomass by 2036 (up from 2,490 MW at present), followed by biogas at 1,280 MW (up from 311.5 MW) and metropolitan and industrial waste-to-energy at 550 MW (up from 74 MW).

Solar farm licence holders since 2010 remain unable to produce electricity, as the operators requested licences though they were incapable of investing in the projects.

By year-end, if all the delayed 1,000-MW solar farms remain unable to operate, those licences will be revoked, Gen Anantaporn said.

Next year, the Energy Ministry will open bidding for a total of 800 MW of solar power and let agricultural cooperatives and state agencies submit their operating requests.

After all 800 MW is obtained, the ministry will no longer pursue development of solar power until technology is developed to make such projects commercially viable.

The plan is for Thailand to have 6,000 MW of solar power output by 2036, up from 1,302 MW at the end of last month.

At a time of plunging global oil prices, renewable energy has lost some of its lustre.

In other issues, Gen Anantaporn said the North and Northeast might need to wait a bit longer for the development of transmission lines by the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (Egat).

Egat expects to have those new lines up and running by 2019.

