

POWER

Green energy drive 'hurt by state laws'

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The government's goal to double its target for renewable energy production by 2036 is likely to be stonewalled by its own restrictive policies, energy experts say.

The increase aims to boost the country's total renewable energy production to 6,000 megawatts per year.

The problem mainly stems from the state's policy that prevents small-scale power producers — such as private homes or small factories — from producing renewable energy from their own solar-panelled rooftops and selling it directly on to state utility grids.

"There are certain concerns, so we can't liberalise the renewable energy market at this time," said Patthamaporn Poonkasem, an expert on renewable energy at the Department of Alternative Energy Development and Efficiency (Dede), under the Ministry of Energy.

"However, there are prospects that the market will be fully liberalised in the future if we can develop and upgrade our power grid system."

The "concerns" of the policy-makers mainly revolve around the potential after-effects of the sale of renewable energy by these small producers.

Among them is the possible impact on revenues of the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (Egat), the Metropolitan Electricity Authority (MEA) and Provincial Electricity Authority (PEA) if individual homes and small factories are allowed to produce energy for their own consumption and sell the surplus to the state.

There is an expectation that such allowances will deplete revenues of some of the state enterprises in the long run, said Ms Patthamaporn, who serves as the Dede's director of Innovation Group, Bureau of Solar Energy Development.

Another major concern is the technical impact on the power grid system which has not been upgraded to receive huge amounts of renewable energy from individual power producers.

At the moment, there is a huge amount of renewable energy produced by small- and large-scale vendors being sold on to the state grids, leading to concerns that if more than 2,000 megawatts of solar power per year is transmitted to the power grids, it might make the system unstable, Ms Patthamaporn said.

She was speaking during the launch of "Solar Rooftop Implementation Guidelines & Tools for Thailand" handbook on Tuesday.

The handbook offers instructions for the financial and physical implementation of small-scale rooftop photovoltaic projects and provides power purchase agreement templates and business models that may help open new market segments.

The guidebook is part of a cooperation between the United States Agency for International Development (USAid) and the German Federal Enterprise for International Cooperation (GIZ), which aim to promote solar energy usage in Southeast Asia to help reduce carbon emissions and combat climate change.

Thomas Chrometzka, Energy Programme Director for GIZ Thailand, said owners of commercial and industrial facilities are considering solar PV rooftop investments in increasing numbers, to reduce their electricity expenditure.

They also want to gain access to clean energy and mitigate climate change.

Angela Hogg, director of the USAid Regional Environment Office, said renewable energy is essential to sustainable development in Asia, and Thailand is a regional leader in developing and implementing clean power solutions. —