

Coal plants shelved for 3 years

Energy Ministry announces latest delay for contentious southern projects

YUTHANA PRAIWAN



The Energy Ministry has decided to postpone the start date for construction of two coal-fired power plants in Krabi and Songkhla provinces by another three years, saying the aim is for further study to create more understanding among local people.

The Krabi power plant finished its environmental and health impact assessment (EHIA) report in early 2016 and was awaiting word from the government on a start date for construction, but then the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (Egat) was ordered to revise the EHIA in April 2016.

The Krabi plant will have a capacity of

800 megawatts and is scheduled to begin operations in 2025.

The other site is the 2,000MW Thepha power plant, which is near to wrapping up EHIA approval and has yet to be assigned a start date for construction. This plant is scheduled to begin operations in 2024.

Energy Minister Siri Jirapongphan said the further study will take an additional three years until the end of 2020, after which time policymakers will decide whether the two project sites are appropriate for fossil-fuel power generation.

"Three years from now, policymakers will decide how to provide the biomass power plant licence to develop and operate a combined 300MW after the three-year postponement of the two coal-fired power plants," Mr Siri said. "Alternative-fuel power

plants, including new locations, will also be studied further if policymakers decide to scrap all coal-fired power plants."

Egat has been ordered to revamp the high-voltage transmission line (HVTL) across the southern region to improve efficiency of power transmission.

The southern region has only two gas-fired power plants: Songkhla's Chana, operated by Egat, and Nakhon Sri Thammarat's Khanom, operated by Electricity Generating Plc (Egco).

Both can utilise capacity at only 85% for peak-hour demand.

"Once the HVTL revamp project has finished, the power generation system's capacity utilisation will rise to nearly 100%," Mr Siri said.

He said power generation from biomass

is expected to have a tariff lower than that for fossil-fuel electricity, adding that renewable technology will no longer be handicapped relative to fossil fuel in terms of power cost.

Last October, the Energy Regulatory Commission opened an auction for investors to obtain a licence to develop and operate renewable power at a combined capacity of 300MW.

Egat governor Kornrasit Pakchotanon said demand for electricity in the South has grown each year in a range of 4.5-5% and last year's peak-hour demand was 2,624MW, while power generated in the peak hour was 2,164MW.

Egat had to import electricity from central power plants and from Malaysia to make up the shortfall of power supply.