



More than 100 black-clad members of the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand's labour union yesterday protest against Energy Minister Siri Jirapongphan's deal last week with anti-coal demonstrators to halt two southern coal-fired power plant projects.

# Egat union slams minister over coal decision

THE NATION 5A

ABOUT 130 black-clad members of the labour union of the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (Egat) protested against Energy Minister Siri Jirapongphan yesterday, alleging he abused his authority by signing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with anti-coal demonstrators last week.

Egat employees nationwide also wore black yesterday as a symbol of protest against the minister, and called on Siri to clearly express Thailand's energy policy.

Three bus-loads of Egat employees rallied outside the ministry compound in Bangkok at 11am, as they submitted a petition via assistant permanent secretary Theerasak Charassrivisist to object to Siri signing the MOU on February 20 to put on hold and review coal-fired power plant projects in Krabi and Songkhla's Thepa district.

The MOU led to the withdrawal of the projects' existing environmental and health impact assess-

ments (EHIAs) and required a strategic environmental assessment to consider the suitability of coal-fired power plant projects to be conducted within 90 days.

The group, led by union deputy leader Panomtuan Thongnoi, asked four questions of the minister:

1. Does Siri really understand his roles and duties as Energy Minister? As the two projects were approved by the National Energy Policy Council and their EHLA-producing procedure was approved by Cabinet, does this mean his deal with the anti-coal demonstrators is against the regulations and authority?

2. Did Siri give the same importance to the majority of people in the areas, who accept the projects thanks to Egat's hard work, as he did to the anti-coal demonstrators?

3. On what grounds or information did Siri base his previous remark that the South would not need big power plants in the next five years? If the South's demand for power has increased - and EGAT has predicted the problem would start in 2019 -

and it is in need of a major power plant that would take five years to build, what will they do? What policy does he have for energy security and electricity prices that won't be a burden on users?

4. As nearly 70 per cent of electricity generation is currently using natural gas, what is being done to keep a balance and ensure the security of the country's energy system?

"Egat staff don't understand how the coal-plant projects with clear study and process in past three to four years be considered by the minister who spent less than three hours doing so before signing the MOU and ordering, via the media, that they be put on hold," Panomtuan said. "We need clarity and a proper use of state authority."

He also said Egat contributed more than Bt20 billion to the country via the Finance Ministry each year. Egat was "the state enterprise champion in earning money" and had already submitted Bt13 billion to the state coffers in the first quarter of the 2018 fiscal year, he added.