

ENERGY

New minister set to face raft of clean power challenges

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Ongoing work to draft a new version of the much-delayed power development plan (PDP) and the state plan to promote clean power trade are challenges for Auttapol Rerkpiboon, the likely next energy minister.

In addition to implementing domestic fuel price and power bill policies by the end of this year, Mr Auttapol, former chief executive and president of national oil and gas conglomerate PTT Plc, will have to work with officials to push for a new PDP and a pilot project on renewable power trade among companies, according to observers.

He is set to serve as a member of the National Energy Policy Council (NEPC), which earlier decided to scrap the 2024 version of the PDP and replace it with a new one.

The NEPC is to be chaired by Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul.

Scheduled for enforcement between 2024 and 2037, the PDP was not enacted during the Paetongtarn Shinawatra government, though it passed a public hearing last year.

The delay resulted partly from a call from energy analysts for authorities to revise some key electricity generation issues in the plan. Experts in the power industry also want the government to better promote clean energy usage.

"They want the PDP to set a more ambitious goal for renewable power

development," said Praipol Koomsup, an economist at Thammasat University who was an assistant to former energy minister Narongchai Akrasanee.

The 2024 PDP set a target to have renewable power make up 51% of the nation's total power supply by 2037, up from 22% at the end of 2024.

According to Mr Praipol, the proportion is too low if Thailand wants to achieve its net-zero target, a balance between greenhouse gas emissions and absorption, by 2065.

The Pheu Thai Party-led government was also criticised for being too slow in translating a pilot project on a direct power purchase agreement (PPA) into action, though the project was approved by the NEPC last year.

The direct PPA enables businesses, particularly electricity-intensive data centre operators, to directly purchase electricity from producers.

Peer-to-peer power trade in the renewables category has not yet been permitted in Thailand.

Similar pilot projects on direct PPAs are being carried out in the Philippines and Taiwan, said Naruechon Dhumrongpiyawut, chief executive of Gunkul Engineering, an integrated clean energy developer.

She said she was interested in seeking business opportunities in these countries and others in Asia-Pacific where the direct PPA model is applied.