

ENERGY

ERC readies renewed push for solar rooftop scheme

YUTHANA PRAIWAN

The Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) is gearing up to promote the household solar rooftop scheme and encourage participation after the current enrolment fell short of expectations.

This programme began in May after the launch of the national power development plan for 2018-37. The latest plan focuses on new solar power generation of 10,000 megawatts, all coming from the solar rooftop type installed by homeowners.

Power capacity under the scheme starts at 100MW per year during 2019-27 for households and increases solar power generation to 1,000MW per year from 2028 on, ultimately reaching 10,000MW by 2037.

As of early July, the ERC reported that the enrolment from households achieved only 8.74MW from the target of 100MW.

Narupat Amornkosit, secretary-general of the ERC, said the commission will promote the scheme heavily over the next two weeks.

"Many homeowners do not yet know about this scheme from the ERC and other state utilities, so we will step up efforts to promote it again," Ms Narupat said.

"Our expectation of 100MW

power generation will end in December, so we have plenty of time to work on it."

Last week, the Department of Alternative Energy Development and Efficiency said it would ask the Energy Ministry to launch a revised solar scheme for the public.

The revised plan should add solar power farms in order to attract more private investors to this scheme.

Solar power, which has been promoted in Thailand since 2007, will be sold to the state grid under power purchase agreements at 9,846MW.

Moreover, a rising power tariff rate, higher generating efficiency and the lower cost of solar panels have attracted hundreds of business operators to install solar rooftops as an independent power supply (IPS) over the last five years.

As of December 2018, power generation from IPS was 1,478MW, jumping from only 400MW in early 2017.

Separately, the ERC yesterday approved the continuation of the fuel tariff (Ft) rate of 3.64 baht per kilowatt-hour for September-December, the third period of 2019.

Power bills have been stable over the four periods from September 2017 to December 2018 at 3.60 baht per kWh, then the ERC

increased them for the first period of 2019, January-April, to 3.64 baht and maintained the rate for the second period.

Increasing the Ft rate would affect consumers' power bills and overall domestic demand, Ms Narupat said.

"The Thai economy is suffering from the instability of the US-China trade war and shrinking exports," she said, adding that the ERC thus decided to maintain the Ft rate for another four months.

Ms Narupat said the ERC is set to allocate 9 billion baht to manage the Ft rate for September-December.

Of the budget, 3 billion baht will come from the ERC's power regulation and management budget from the previous year and 6 billion baht will come from spending of the three state power utilities (the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand, the Metropolitan Electricity Authority and the Provincial Electricity Authority) to handle the higher cost of power generation.

"This budget will be managed temporarily to support maintaining the Ft rate in the third period of 2019," Ms Narupat said.

The ERC forecasts electricity demand during September-December at 64.42 billion kWh, down 5.8% from May-August, in line with the seasonal decrease.