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LEAD Blackout-Ani
CONSUMERS CAN SUE TNB, SAYS ANI AROPE

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 6 (Bernama) -- Consumers can sue Tenaga Nasional Berhad for compensation over the inconvenience and losses caused by the peninsula-wide power failure last Saturday, TNB executive chairman Tan Dr Ani Arope said today.

But it is up to the court to decide on the merit of any claims, Dr Ani told a news conference at the TNB headquarters here in his first public statement on the massive power failure.

Dr Ani said under the Electricity Supply Act 1990, TNB was only responsible or liable to pay compensation if an incident was clearly shown to have resulted from "negligence on the part of persons employed by TNB".

"We are not responsible if (an incident resulted) from faulty construction ...if it's unavoidable accident, wear and tear or overloading due to unauthorised connection of equipment or to defects in any installation not provided by the licensee or by TNB," he said.

He said people could submit their claims and TNB would not prevent people from doing that.

The power breakdown last Saturday began at 5.17pm. Power was fully restored by 8.30am the next day.

In a statement, TNB traced the breakdown to an equipment malfunction during a switching operation in the switchyard at Paka Power Station in Terengganu.

It said the malfunction caused an initial loss of generation of 920MW at Paka, comprising 160MW from the TNB station and 760MW from the YTL independent power producer plant.

"This loss also triggered losses in generation totalling 2,113MW from other power stations in the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia.

"Although the contingency measures were in place, the quantum of generation loss was too large for the contingency measures to cope. This resulted in the collapse of the system."

The statement said the incident was not caused by the inadequacy of the distribution and transmission network.

It said the present system has a high proportion of gas turbine generation (62 per cent) which has inherent characteristics that do not help in system recovery under severe loss of generation.

A preliminary report of the incident has been submitted to the government on Sunday, it added.

The country's previous widespread power failure occurred in September 1992, when the lights went out in nine of the peninsula's 13 states.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the blackout on Saturday had embarrassed Malaysia which was being looked to as a model by other developing countries.

Responding to Dr Mahathir's criticism, Dr Ani apologised for the inconvenience and embarrassment caused to the people and country.

He explained that he was in Rome during the incident and was informed at midnight on the same day.

Dr Ani said last Saturday's power failure could not be compared to the collapse of the national grid system in 1992.

"It is different. In 1992, the collapse was triggered by insufficient power supply, so you cannot relate both incidents," he said.

He said TNB managed to restore full power supply within 16 hours of Saturday's breakdown compared to 48 hours in 1992.

On whether an official inquiry would be launched into the incident, Dr Ani said it was up to the Cabinet to decide while TNB has set up its own investigation team.

Responding to criticisms that the national grid system is inefficient as the fault at a single station could shut down the entire transmission and supply system, the TNB statement said the national grid system is operated as an integrated grid as it is the most optimised manner to channel supplies to various parts of Peninsular Malaysia.

"This is the general practice of utilities elsewhere. In fact, it is the trend worldwide for higher degree of interconnection, i.e. within the utilities itself and between neighbouring utilities.

"Islanded or non-interconnected operations, while providing a disruption that is limited, would also experience other forms of disturbances such as more frequent surges. It does not have the economy of scale.

"The present grid network in itself is duplicated to provide the redundancy. As an example, the circuits connecting two power stations are double and furthermore loops are provided as well.

"A further degree of duplication is provided to some extent at different voltage level such as 275kV and 500kV levels. Further duplication of the total grid network would just increase the cost of providing electricity."

The statement said that in 1992, when TNB experienced a system collapse, the incident was thoroughly studied by an external consultant approved by the government.

It said the study made recommendations in the areas of transmission and generation which included improvement in maintenance procedures, operational procedures, training and improvement to equipment.

These recommendations have been implemented and where improvement to equipment takes time to be carried out, they are being implemented, it said. -- BERNAMA

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