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Team set up to probe blackout

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - An investigation team headed by Tenaga Nasional Berhad president and chief executive officer Datuk Pian Sukro has been established to ascertain the cause of the blackout that hit five northern States and Kuala Lumpur International Airport yesterday.

Investigations will be carried out by team members involved in transmission from Bukit Beruntung (Selangor) to Batu Gajah (Perak).

TNB senior manager for media relations, Syed Hidzam Osman, said today the team would also determine the losses incurred.

He said the findings would be submitted to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and other relevant authorities.

The blackout happened about 9.58am after part of the national grid tripped between Bukit Beruntung and Batu Gajah.

It was the worst nationwide outage in seven years. It occurred when the second transmission line between both points went down after being activated to replace the main line, which had to be shut down for maintenance work.

This led to a disruption in supply of between two and four hours in Kelantan, Perlis, Kedah, Penang and Perak. Supply to KLIA was restored after 36 minutes.

Syed Hidzam said as soon as the blackout occurred, a 24-hour operation room manned by 10 TNB staff was activated here.

Operation rooms were also set up at core centres in Petaling Jaya, Perak, Penang and Kedah.

Asked how long the investigations would take, he said: "It's hard to say but we will keep the media informed."

Yesterday, TNB chairman Datuk Dr Awang Adek Hussin said power to the five States was disrupted after the tripping of the line between Bukit Beruntung and Batu Gajah, which also caused the line between Tanah Merah, Kelantan and Kenyir, Terengganu, to trip.

Pian was quoted as saying yesterday that the tripping was due to glitches in the power distribution system and not caused by sabotage or "low voltage capacity".

Meanwhile, Malaysia Airports (Sepang) Sdn Bhd general manager Abdul Hamid Mohd Ali said the blackout which hit KLIA yesterday was a test for its back-up system which relied on generator sets.

He said there were still some improvements to be made to the back-up system.

"We also managed to test 100 per cent power load of the generator sets installed at KLIA," he said.

Currently, GDC Sdn Bhd supplies 80 per cent of power to KLIA while another 20 per cent comes from TNB.

This was the second time KLIA was hit by a blackout. The first was in April 1999.

"We do 70 per cent of generator back-up load testing every week," he said, adding that a 100 per cent testing was not done for fear of major power disruption.

He said KLIA would rely on TNB if there was power disruption from GDC.

"Four minutes after the TNB supply was disrupted, GDC supply was also disrupted. We kept in constant touch with TNB. By 10.48am, TNB managed to give us the supply. In stages, with the back-up from our generator sets,

we recovered fully by 12pm," he added.

He said they managed to cope with essential supply from emergency generator sets.

"Only one of the two aerotrains ferrying passengers from the main terminal building to the aircraft gates could be used during the disruption."

Overall, he said, there was only a slight disruption to services at the airport.

Six flights had to be rescheduled - four domestic and two international.

The other hiccups were baggage transfer, ticketing and passenger check-in which had to be handled manually for 30 minutes.