

Award for nuclear plant as early as 2014
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If the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) is to be followed to a tee, the contract for Malaysia's first-ever nuclear power plant will be awarded as early as 2014.

This is in order to ensure that the twin unit power plant begins operations in 2021.

According to the ETP timeline, which is "still under development", all studies will be completed by the end of next year, while planning will be concluded by the start of 2013.

However, procurement work will start midway into 2012, while construction in earnest will begin in 2017.

The project is expected to cost RM21.3 billion of investment up to 2020, although it is unclear if the government will foot the whole bill.

Interestingly, the plan, which details out timelines for project work including site safety analysis and developing regulation, does not state the duration allocated for public engagement and acceptance.

This is despite stating it as the first step in "four critical path items (which) must be addressed with highest priority".

The four critical path items are:

- Public acceptance of the project
- Ratification of relevant international treaties
- Developing correct regulatory framework
- Approvals for plan sites, including from local populace.

The Nuclear Power Development Steering Committee, headed by the Energy, Green Technology and Water Ministry, was set up in July 2009 and has been mandated to plan and coordinate the project.

The committee is tasked to conduct studies to aid the preparation of an infrastructure plan, expected to be ready by 2013.

According to the ETP roadmap, site selection study and pre-feasibility study are also expected to be completed by then.

The nuclear project will be spearheaded by national energy giant TNB, which had recently expressed that it is ready to do so.

More big hydro for Sarawak?

Commenting on this at the ETP roadmap launch yesterday, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Idris Jala said that nuclear is only one of several renewable energy sources explored.

“Discussions will take place (about nuclear). There will be no shortcuts, safety is paramount,” he said.

Among the other sources of renewable energy noted in the roadmap are five more hydroelectric dams, like Bakun, in Sarawak.

While hydroelectric power is touted as green energy by some, environmentalists refute this claim due to the severe damage that big hydroelectric dams cause to the eco-system.

The Bakun hydroelectric dam, for example, has caused tremendous loss of rainforest, while badly planned relocation efforts of about 10,000 indigenous people have left problems still unresolved.

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