

CEPSI 2018 empowers imagination on the future of telcos,utilities

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 21 (Bernama) -- As the three-day Conference of Electric Power Supply Industry Conference (CEPSI) 2018 drew to a close on Thursday, it can be said that the 2,000 or more delegates ended their participation with many positive takeaways.

Particularly, this was in the manner on how conference attendees can reimagine the electricity supply industry (ESI) in accordance with CEPSI 2018's theme of "Re-imagining Utility of the Future" as many thought leaders shared their views on how the industry will transform in the next 10 to 20 years.

However, the theme that struck a chord for many to ponder on was on the eventual convergence of the power and telecommunication industries as both of these heavily-networked utilities have much in common.

Many alluded to the significant cost savings these two industries can reap together if they earnestly discuss what can be shared and how best they can move forward together for the benefit of consumers and their bottom line.

Some speakers at the conference opined that such leading-edge or even common sense collaborations had already taken place in some parts of the world and both the residential and business communities there benefited from the synergies.

During the keynote session on "ESI Innovation and Smart Solutions", both Accenture Digital (ASEAN) Managing Director James Chong and Nokia Global Vice-President of Energy Segment Kamal Ballout shared the view that alliances between power and telecommunication companies (telcos) will be the way to move forward.

They believed that while lowering costs was part of the process, utilities must be mindful of additional services they can undertake to ensure revenues do not diminish with technology advancement.

Both Chong and Ballout concurred that power companies and telcos should explore areas where they can garner more businesses through the Internet of Things with other service providers so that synergies formed could be converted into better benefits for the development of cities and their residents.

Huawei Technologies Co Ltd Chief Technology Officer Paul Scanlan shared with participants why power and telcos will likely enter into more discussions to determine synergies on how to work together for the benefit of consumers in the future.

He best summed it up by citing the case of the installation of a telecommunication base station which needed input from both telco and power utilities, and if both could work together, the installation costs could be brought down which in turn, would benefit consumers.

That being the case, Scanlan said there was much room for the two networked industries to work together, coordinated by regulators.

In the case of Tenaga Nasional Bhd (TNB), which was directed by the government to explore a possible entry into the telco industry, Scanlan said it made good business sense as the utility company already had an extensive infrastructure of cable network.

Saying that it was always good to see competition as it would benefit consumers in the long-run, Scanlan said in the final analysis, it would depend on how TNB would use its existing infrastructure and available technologies to move into the telco space.

Another positive area for TNB, the host of CEPSI 2018, is the installation of smart meters which has helped a number of power utilities to understand their customers better and

meet their needs.

Tokyo Electric Power (TEPCO) and Manila Electric Company (MERALCO) both showed that smart meters had been smart choices for themselves and their customers.

TEPCO Power Grid Inc Executive Vice-President Dr Hiroshi Okamoto said the power generation and distribution firm has successfully installed 17 million smart meters for its residential customers by using three different technologies, wireless (radio frequency) mesh network, server (wireless star) network and power line communication.

He said very few TEPCO customers refused to instal smart meters because of radio frequency emission concerns and therefore, it did not see any issue in deploying 29 million smart meters for all its residential customers by 2020.

TNB is in the midst of installing 310,000 smart meters in Melaka. The project, which commenced this year, is expected to reach 8.8 million users in Peninsular Malaysia.

MERALCO Chief Technology Advisor Gavin D. Barfield is all for pushing the case for smart meters as they enabled price-conscious consumers to better monitor their power usage.

These meters, especially pre-paid types, also facilitated consumers to pay their utility bills at local stores that sold credit topping-up or loading services whenever they ran out of credit.

“Additionally, smart meters also helped landlords, renting out their premises, to have better financial management of power usage and bill payment by their tenants, as their bills could be settled on the spot with the availability of real-time information,” he said.

Another interesting development that emerged from the installation of prepaid smart meters was the reduction of electricity thefts from nearby power lines in the slum areas of Manila as the dwellers were prepared to pay for power usage themselves in accordance to

their needs.

“The availability of prepaid smart meters also eliminated the need for slum dwellers to obtain electricity from more well-to-do neighbours who may charge rates higher than the power utility itself,” added Barfield.

CEPSI 2018 started off with an opening address by Energy, Science, Technology, Environment and Climate Change Minister Yeo Bee Yin, who spoke of the need for the power industry reform through the Malaysia Electricity Supply Industry reform initiative 2.0 (MESI 2.0) which would create greater competition in the power generation sector.

She also announced the reactivation the Malaysia Programme Office for Power Electricity Reform (MyPower) agency to drive these reforms over the next 36 months.

TNB Chief Executive Officer Datuk Seri Ir Azman Mohd said the power utility would work closely with MyPower to contribute to the reforms with its vast experience in the sector given the many years of its existence.

“Changes in the electricity generation industry in Malaysia is expected with the implementation of MESI 2.0, and TNB is ready to embrace industry reforms that was rapidly changing by the day compared with 20 years ago.” he said.

Azman also said TNB wanted to change that common misperception on its efficiency due to the company’s position as a monopoly in the country.

In actual fact, he stressed that TNB was just as competitive as some of the power utilities in developed countries.

If one were to measure its performance through the supply average interruption duration index per customer per year, the average interruption was at just one to two minutes.

Moving forward, TNB is also better equipped with the knowledge that the government will not pursue nuclear energy as an option following a special address from none other than Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who was also the guest of honour when TNB last hosted CEPSI in 1996.

That clarity, as well as the availability of leading-edge solutions for the next decade or longer, should empower power utilities like TNB to imagine what the road ahead in will be in terms of efficiency, power and convergence, as well as meeting customer demands.

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