


Negros Island is Philippines solar capital

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BACOLOD CITY, Philippines – Negros Island is the solar capital of the Philippines, according to a declaration from Fortunato Sibayan, chief of the Solar and Wind Energy Management Division of the Department of Energy last week.

Sibayan issued the statement during his visit to Negros Occidental where he led the groundbreaking rites of the P2-billion 25-megawatt solar plant at Hacienda Makina in Barangay Rizal, Silay City, Negros Occidental.

“The total megawatt capacities of all the service contracts issued nationwide is 2,000 and you have 1,000 here,” he said, citing the current database of the DOE.

There are a lot of service contractors in Negros, and that 1,000-MW of power is more than enough to meet the energy needs of the island, he said. “With the new technology coming in right now, like the storage electricity, there will come a time between three to five years that the variability will not be a problem anymore. Solar power is a variable resource,”

Sibayan said the DOE had approved a total of 12 solar projects in Negros Island, and majority of these are now in their pre-development state, with eight of them expected to generate 430 MW.

He also said two projects are now in the development and construction stage: The 132.5-MW solar plant in Cadiz City and the 18-MW in Victorias City. The only operational solar plant in the province is in San Carlos City, which generates 45-MW, while the construction of its second phase, at 200 MW, is still ongoing.

Within two years, other solar power plants in the province are expected to be fully operational, but all permits must be satisfied, including approved resolutions from the local government units, he said.

Sibayan said there is now a total of 132-MW solar power already operational nationwide, 45 MW of which came from Negros Occidental, and that there are 10 pending applications for solar projects here, totaling 552 MW.

When the solar projects push through, Negros Island will generate a total of 1,178-MW power, which comprised 38 percent of the 3,062-MW solar power nationwide, and this put Negros Island the country's solar capital, he said.

The projected 1,000-MW solar power will not endanger, however, the food security in the province, as the national government will still prioritize food over energy. "The good thing about the renewable power plants, particularly solar and wind farms, is that they are considered farms. Sila lang ang power plants na tinatawag nating farm," he said.

Power farms can co-exist with agricultural activities, Sibayan said. "That's the reality of solar. Once an agricultural land is converted into commercial land or residential, it's irreversible. But once you use an agricultural land for solar, it can be converted back to agricultural land," he said.

Further, Sibayan said the most important aspect for any solar project is the ownership of the land, and it will not push through if the permits are not satisfied.

Solar power is an all-year-round supply as long as the sun shines, "The good thing is it's free. It's one of the few resources that we can have for free. Right now, solar power is at P8.69 per kilowatt hour, representing generation cost, including fit and tariff allowance," he said.

"If we compare it to the generation charges of other power plants, it's expensive. But I don't look at it as expensive. The most expensive electricity is when you don't have electricity at all," Sibayan added.

BARANGAY RIZAL

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