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A solar 'first' for St Michael

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Penampang: SM St Michael became the first school in Sabah - and probably in the country - to have the solar photovoltaics (PV) system installed on its roof to reduce the school's electricity consumption.

Thanks to a worldwide project named "dena Solar Roofs Programme" that is coordinated by the Deutsche Energie-Agentur GmbH (dena) or German Energy Agency and co-financed by the German Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology (BMWi), the school became the programme's first recipient in Malaysia.

The aim is to install the PV system on the roof of a Malaysian school and to teach the students about environment protection and renewable energies as well as encourage international partnerships.

St Michael was chosen due to its successful environment-friendly projects as well as the school's positive spirit and enthusiasm in advocating renewable energy.

Solarsysteme Sachsen GmbH completed the installation of the rooftop PV system this year in January.

It was initiated in October last year in cooperation with the school.

The PV technology fits well in Malaysian tropical weather where almost every roof is suitable for PV systems as long as it fulfils the static load requirement. Thomas Brandt, General Manager of Malaysia-German Chamber of Commerce, said the prospect is especially interesting for East Malaysia because of the remote areas where energy supply via the national grid is not possible or too expensive.

"PV systems are seen as an innovative option by offering a cleaner, more sustainable solution to consumer's dependency on fossil fuels to generate electricity.

"It is also a mature and secure technology which is independent from energy supplier and future rising technology costs," he said.

The PV systems installed at SM St Michael consists of 24 panels, two inverters and a battery system distributed over 41 square metres rooftop of the school, which has 903 students.

The solar system generates approximately 6,800 kilowatt hours (kWh) of solar energy per year and helps to reduce the school's utility costs.

The system also includes a back-up system whereby the energy stored in the battery can be used during power blackout and can provide energy 24 hours a day.

In an effort to reach out and educate the local community of the benefits of the rooftop solar system, a display panel has been installed in the centre of the school to display the actual power in kW and the accumulated generated energy (in kWh) and CO2 savings over the entire period.



The "dena Solar Roofs Programme" was launched in 2004 and is co-financed by the Germany Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology.

It aims to support solar energy companies to enter new markets.

Gabriele Eichner of the German Energy Agency said ever since the dena solar roofs programme was launched, about 50 similar projects have been carried out in other parts of the world.

"The main goal is to support the cooperation between German and Malaysian experts in the field of photovoltaic and also sharing of knowledge about the systems under the specific conditions in Malaysia," she said.

Sustainable energy supply, she said, is increasingly becoming global importance to many societies in the world.

Today, she said, there are more than 17 per cent of the final energy consumption is covered by renewable energies worldwide and provided employment to five million people.

She said that in Germany alone, there are more than 380,000 people who produce, develop and sell solar plants, and thus create value.

"Currently, photovoltaic is the 13th most important energy source worldwide," she said.

Permanent Secretary, Datuk Hashim Paijan, officiated at the event on behalf of Minister of Industrial Development, Datuk Raymond Tan Shu Kiah.

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