



COLUMN

Sustainable Development

BY SCOTT YOUNGER

Scott Younger is director of PT Nusantara Infrastructure and President Commissioner of PT Glendale Partners.



Energy and Water

In recent weeks I have noticed a number of writings on the above key global topics of energy and water, as well as personally taking part in some related discussions. Sometimes the discussions have included the issue of population and its distribution in relation to natural resources and derived commodities, all part of the sustainable development equation. Infrastructure usually comes into every talk somewhere and, for reasons of daily necessity, remains high on the agenda in Indonesia.

In the power sector, Indonesia has now reached the situation that will lead to blackouts and brownouts and could affect businesses and populations in affected areas. The crisis position has been looming for some time and underlines past failures to implement planned projects to obviously keep the supply need, dwindling for some time, ahead of demand. We should prepare to have an uncomfortable few years since it takes a minimum of four years, assuming no delays, to complete a new coal-fired power station.

Much is written about the dangers of burning fossil fuels, most of it lacking scientific facts, and Indonesia has no choice in the current critical position but to pursue building key coal-fired stations as quickly as pos-


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sible. However, a greater effort is needed to get renewable projects up and running. Indonesia has many renewable options, albeit the location of some of its geothermal and hydro projects rules their development as unviable, particularly by being in remote areas.

Meanwhile, advances in the commercial use of solar power are several years ahead of projections and Indonesia should benefit from these developments. Solar is a perfect solution for parts of eastern Indonesia where populations are scattered and small. It will also be part of the design of 21st century urban developments.

The use of fossil fuels for power generation, important to keep industry functioning, may well be phased out before the end of the century. Apart from solar, although not yet at commercial level there is positive work going on with hydrogen as another energy source.

On the water front, there are serious issues for supply in areas of large population and industry and in the tourist island of Bali. Indonesia only uses about 0.55% of its overall fresh water supply, more than 40% of this unfortunately being in Papua. Of the 131 water basins across the archipelago, a high percentage are defined as stressed, that is having a supply below critical demand levels, and the damage from over-abstraction from water tables is very obvious in Jakarta and Semarang, for example.

The government has recognized a need for storing water and it is comforting to see that some of the needed 49 water storage reservoirs are either being planned or under construction. Treating water with respect and proceeding with solutions for its efficient use and re-use and doing more than just talk about sanitation must be at the top of the agenda. We all require a clean and healthy environment, especially with the steady urbanization that is happening across the globe. 

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