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SPARKING A ROOFTOP SOLAR REVOLUTION

TNB subsidiary GSPARX makes solar energy affordable

By D. RAJ and RJ DEVAN

THE Urban Transformation Centre in Ipoh indeed lives up to its name. Once a dirty wet market, it became a mall-and-market in 1983 before part of the mall became a multi-purpose administrative centre.

Now, it has seen another transformation. It is currently a solar-powered building, cutting the Ipoh City Council's electricity bill by 22% and bringing a total savings of about RM2.5mil.

It is one of many rooftop solar projects by TNB subsidiary GSPARX to help people lower their bills and reduce the country's carbon footprint.

Rooftop solar projects are not really new in the country and there are companies offering the solution. GSPARX, however, is set to be right up there despite the competition.

After all, the company which was set up in 2018 has the backing of TNB as its parent company with a proven track record for 72 years – which allows it to make offers others cannot.

It has a very low-barrier entry point, with zero capex for companies and industries that want to have solar rooftop energy.

"Our aim is to bridge the financial gaps faced by commercial, industrial and government (C&I) segments in going solar. With our zero-capex solution, the customer doesn't have to come up with any capital cost to enjoy solar energy," says GSPARX managing director Elmie Fairul Mashuri.

GSPARX provides free consultation for customers to better understand the pain points and options that best suit their needs. All the customers need to do is sign up. GSPARX does the design and installation while the billing is done under the existing TNB system. The savings can come up to anything from RM2mil to RM30mil over the years.



Solar panels installed by GSPARX on the rooftop of UTC Perak. GSPARX takes care of the maintenance for the duration of the contract, with all the extra electricity generated stored in the national grid under the Net Energy Metering scheme.

And there's a bonus. GSPARX takes care of the maintenance for the duration of the contract, whether it is for 10, 20 or 25 years – with all the extra electricity generated stored in the national grid under the Net Energy Metering (NEM) scheme.

The customer just pays the monthly bill, with savings that reach 30%-50% of their usual cost.

NEM is a 10-year offer, but with battery technology growing in leaps and bounds at competitive pricing, at the end of the decade most excess rooftop solar can probably be stored in briefcase-sized batteries that will provide power round-the-clock.

"We want to create a situation where solar is accessible because GSPARX has made it affordable. In fact, when you think solar, you think GSPARX," Elmie said.

GSPARX already has a host of commercial and industry customers, including universities and hospitals.

Universiti Tun Hussein Onn in Johor, for instance, has been installed with over 15,000 rooftop solar panels spanning a total 33,521sqm – that's the size of about four football fields – producing around 7MWp of power.

The students even got a free unit that can generate 10KWp, enough to power a home with a RM400 monthly electricity bill. It provides a learning opportunity for the students and lecturers in solar photovoltaic (PV) installation and the industry. It's a draw no others can bring.

However, GSPARX is not about to bank on the TNB brand alone to grow. Instead, says Elmie, it intends to provide quality solutions as selling points. Customers not only get to go green but also reduce their bills at zero cost.

GSPARX also creates business and job opportunities for solar power installers via its vendor programmes, besides helping the Government achieve its renewable energy target.

While the price of solar panels has seen a drop over the years, it remains costly for many. However, for those with monthly electricity bills of above RM150, it's worth the initial outlay.

For industries and commercial premises, it's a must.

Elmie says that despite the pandemic lockdowns – or maybe because of them – more companies are waking up to solar as the mark of a new dawn.

"Over the past two years, we have delivered all our projects and we have over 20MWp of rooftop solar power going operational by the end of 2021," he said.

Soon, even housing estates are likely to come solar-ready with GSPARX as the main installer as developers aim to offer sustainable and smart home solutions.

Sime Darby Property's Ilham Residence at Elmina Grove in Shah Alam, expected to be delivered in 2023, is already part of the solar revolution.

Other developers are also coming on board but those already living in homes and high-rise buildings can join the solar revolution too. After all, rooftop solar can be installed for the use of common facilities such as the condo lobbies, gyms, indoor parking and many more.

For residential customers, GSPARX is looking at packages with multiple payment options, such as zero interest in credit cards and loans. It is collaborating with Maybank for mortgage loans and Bank Islam for personal financing at attractive rates. Other financial institutions may soon join in.

Over the last three years, GSPARX has secured 100MWp of rooftop solar projects with residential and commercial customers, including the likes of Mydin, Public Works Department, government ministries and agencies, Sime Darby, universities, local councils and factories.

GSPARX targets to secure 300MWp of rooftop solar PV capacity, equivalent to powering about 60,000 homes for a year.

There's definitely a lot more to come for GSPARX.