

# 'Spin-off industries will speed up Sarawak's development'

# PM launches hydro project

By Farush Khan

KUCHING, Sun. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today launched the RM15 billion Bakun hydro-electric project which is expected to hasten the pace of development in the State.

The Prime Minister, in describing it as the largest project in the development of Sarawak, said it would create spin-off industries which would enrich the State.

These would be in the form of tourism and other related projects.

He hoped that the project scheduled to be completed in 2002 would be earlier than planned as "I would like to see it myself.

"It is very disappointing to launch something and not being able to officiate at the opening," he said to laughter from the crowd at the launching ceremony at the Kuching Santubong Resort, 32km from here.

Also present were Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud, Information Minister Datuk Mohamed Rahmat, Perlis Menteri Besar Dr Abdul Hamid Pawanteh, Edu-

Hasmah arrived here earlier this morning to a red carpet welcome.

Taib, State Cabinet Ministers, local dignitaries, and senior civil servants were present to receive Dr Mahathir and his entourage.

Also present at the airport were cultural dancers in their traditional finery, and several hundred State Barisan Nasional members who brought along their respective party flags.

The Prime Minister said the project was so large that it had taken a long time for the Government to decide on its implementation.

"We could not decide earlier and it was not timely then."

He said he was still the Deputy Prime Minister when the idea was mooted but it was only now that "we see light at the end of the tunnel".

Dr Mahathir added that the project might not have been a success if done 14 years ago as the country could not afford to implement it, and the consumption of electricity was not that high then.

He said a project could only become viable when it could be implemented.

cation Minister Datuk Amar Dr Sulaiman Daud, Works Minister Datuk Leo Moggie and Datuk Ting Pek Khiing, chairman of Ekran Berhad which is undertaking the project.

At a Press conference later, Dr Mahathir said the Economic Planning Unit had agreed recently that Ekran Berhad would lead in the implementation of the Bakun project.

He said the details of other parties participating in the project would be finalised.

Dr Mahathir said two studies had been carried out on the project by the Government and a Brazilian consultant.

He said another study could have been carried out but because it was very expensive, nobody wanted to conduct it, unless they were given the project.

Dr Mahathir and Dr Siti

He said the Government could have borrowed money to implement the project, but the sale of electricity produced might not have been enough to cover the cost of the project.

"Today, Malaysia has progressed and progressed well and we find that we are short of electricity."

He added that the country had to expedite the production of electricity to double the amount needed today.

Dr Mahathir also said the Bakun dam project might cause unhappiness among some quarters who he described as those bent on punishing themselves by not being happy and by saying that such projects would destroy the environment.

"The Government realises that such a project

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## PM: Natural resources should be utilised wisely

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would cost a loss of trees and animals and may result in the displacement of people. But there is a price to be paid in this world and the next."

The Prime Minister added

that the people against hydro-electric projects were those who had destroyed their own forests for cheap electricity.

"They now tell us not to remove trees but they enjoy cheap electricity. This is hy-

pocrisy."

He said the authorities could still provide other facilities besides preserving the environment and flora and fauna while undertaking such projects.

Dr Mahathir criticised

those who incited the people against such projects and projects planned by the Government.

He said it would be a waste not to develop natural resources economically and effectively.