

20 JUN 1996
Anwar-Bakun
ANWAR SAYS HE'S NOT ANTI-BAKUN

KUCHING, June 20 (Bernama) -- Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said today he is not against the RM13.6 billion Bakun hydro-electric project.

He said certain quarters might have alleged he was anti-Bakun in order to point to perceived differences between him and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Speaking to reporters before returning to Kuala Lumpur after a two-day visit, he described the rumours that he was against the project as absurd.

"The Prime Minister is the father figure in this country looking at the welfare (of the people) generally, giving general instructions, and I happen to be given and entrusted with the responsibility...to go into the details," he said.

He said he had to argue the case out and he was sure to be tough with officials as well as Ekran Berhad, the developer of the Bakun project.

"Just because I happen to be strict and tough with the company does not mean I am against (the project)," he said.

Anwar said he had instructed all relevant government agencies to give their fullest cooperation to Ekran representatives although they should be strict with the rules.

They must make sure all procedures were looked into...but they must not cause any unnecessary delay in the execution of the project, he said.

He said the government has done whatever was possible to ensure the project would proceed.

As of today, he said, he was not too sure whether the project could proceed but the government would try to get legal advice on the (court's) judgement but "the order was not specifically to stop".

He said both the company and the government are seeking legal clarification on the issue but if it means to stop work, the project has to stop.

"We have to respect the law. There is no question about ignoring it," he said.

The Kuala Lumpur High Court on Wednesday ruled that the Environment Quality (Prescribed Activities) (Environmental Impact Assessment) Amendment Order 1995, which provides for approval of EIAs for projects in Sarawak to be transferred from federal to state jurisdiction, is invalid.

The effect of the declaration is to render the Bakun project invalid, according to lawyers for three longhouse residents in Sarawak who sued Bakun developer Ekran Berhad and four others.

Anwar said yesterday the court decision concerned a technicality and officials have been directed to remedy it.

Ekran has also given notice it would file an appeal against the judgement.

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