

27 JUN 1996

Mahathir-Procedure

GOVT TO FOLLOW EIA PROCEDURES, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, June 27 (Bernama) -- The government will abide by all Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) procedures and regulations if this can resolve the legal wrangle over the Bakun hydroelectric dam project with regard to environmental laws, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

If there was jurisdictional violation by the project, whether involving state or federal powers, it could be rectified without creating new problems, he told reporters at the international airport near here on his return from his vacation overseas.

He was commenting on the Kuala Lumpur High Court judgment on June 19 which ruled as invalid the Environment Quality (Prescribed Activities) (Environmental Impact Assessment) Amendment Order 1995 that allowed the Sarawak government to approve the EIA report for the Bakun project.

It also declared that Ekran must comply with EIA procedures under the Environmental Quality Act.

"If now you must go back to federal, then we go back to federal government...but the delay of the project is costing us money, millions of dollars every day is going to be lost because of some formality.

"Okay, you want us to approve it, we'll approve it...it is not the problem. If the mistake is that it is not state jurisdiction but federal, okay you tell us...even today the Cabinet can decide," he said.

"If the EIA is wrong I can understand, but only the procedures are wrong. If the procedures are going to delay and which will cost the public and the people money,...there are other means of correcting procedures," he said.

But the Prime Minister made it clear that he was not disputing the court judgment.

"The court has the right to say. We respect the court but courts also should take into consideration the full facts," he said.

Commenting on calls for a stop-work order on the RM13.6 billion project, he said a project such as Bakun should not be taken lightly because those making such calls wanted even projects not directly related to the construction of the dam, such as the runway and housing, to be stopped too.

"The work on the dam has not even commenced. So how can you stop something that hasn't even started?" he asked.

" If it is a matter of procedures, we can correct the procedures, that is a very simple thing. But it seems to me that all the NGOs want is to stop Bakun, it does not matter how much it costs the nation or how difficult it is for the nation," he said.

The Prime Minister said Malaysia could not afford to hold a referendum for every project implemented in the country, otherwise the contry would remain backward and continue to be supressed by foreign powers.

" This is what developed countries want to see, that Malaysia should not develop," he said. -- BERNAMA

AU YBY JK