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Mahathir-Electricity

HYDRO-ELECTRIC POWER BEST CHOICE FOR ENVIRONMENT

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 21 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today hydro-electric power must be considered the best choice for the environment if "we want to claim electricity as the intelligent choice for the environment."

He said that the next choice is gas followed by fuel-oil and coal while wind, solar, waste and biomass were only of academic interest at the moment.

"When we think of electricity as a clean source of power, we have to remember that in many instances we are preventing pollution from being dispersed over a wide area by consigning it to one specific site where we generate the electricity," he said when opening the 11th Conference of The Electricity Power Supply Industry (CEPSI) at Putra World Trade Centre here.

Dr Mahathir said the use of hydro power to generate electricity would not pollute the atmosphere as compared to the use of coal or fuel-oil.

"Of course, hydro-electric plants will change the character of vast tracts of land, possibly primal forest. But these land are also threaten by logging, clearing for agriculture including shifting cultivation and human settlement eventually," he said.

The five-day conference and trade fair is being attended by some 2,000 delegates from 44 countries. Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB) is hosting the event.

The Prime Minister said hydro-electric plant could be designed to minimise environmental damage by largely preserving the flora and fauna to improve the attractiveness of the surroundings.

Electricity, he said, continue to play a unique role in technological innovation and was the best form of energy which allows for a high degree of control as it was able to power the smallest appliance to the largest industrial processes.

"Clearly, the country with cheap and abundant electric power supply can develop very quickly. The developed countries invariably have huge generating capacities and they are therefore able to make full use of their economic potentials," he said.

Developing countries on the other hand were faced with many obstacles even if they have huge power generating potential in the form of great rivers.

The obstacles include high capital cost for the construction of hydro-electric plants and environmental issues which the developed countries did not have to face when they were developing their huge hydro power, he added.

Dr Mahathir said to overcome the objection of environmentalists requires even bigger capital for environmental care not directly related to power generation.

"The result is that the poor countries are likely to be deprived of cheap electrical power which will condemn them to perpetual poverty. The saddest thing is that poor people are the biggest destroyers of the environment.

"To sustain life, they often cut down the whole forest for firewood. Hundreds of millions of poor people are chopping down trees everyday in order to burn will soon destroy all our forests, besides releasing huge quantities of carbon dioxide into the air," he said.

The Prime Minister said in many poor countries, people living in forest

areas still burn and slash large tracts of virgin forest in order to raise crops through shifting cultivation but the poor people are not being criticised for doing so.

However, the rich capitalists and the governments which develop power plants were morally and ethically more suitable as targets for criticism, he said, adding that this kind of attitude would only help destroy the environment.

"We have to be brave enough to face and speak the truth. We should not be rigid and hold on to conventions and attitudes which are going to harm us.

"The fact is that poverty hurts the environment. If poverty is to be overcome, we must accept that the poor must accept changes in their lifestyles and even in their habitat.

"It will cause some pain at first but their losses can be minimised and even compensated for. The important thing is to eradicate poverty and consequently the threat to the environment. And power projects will contribute towards this objective in many ways and in perpetuity," he said.

Dr Mahathir said if electricity generation could be made cheap, a greater number of people would be able to enjoy its benefits like improving their quality of life and at the same time the environment would be less damaged.

He said the 11th Cepsi was timely especially in Southeast Asia where there were a number of emerging economies very much in need of electric power to facilitate their development.

Malaysia, he said, would be interested not only to install sufficient capacity but to participate in the planting of new electric power generating capacities in other countries.

The conference will discuss some 400 working papers which include technical matters as well as regulatory issues, utility pricing, power purchase agreements, industry conditions and needs.

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