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Mahathir - Bakun

PLEASE MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

By: Ahmad Fuad Yahya

KAPIT, Sarawak, March 16 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the so-called western environmentalists opposed to the Bakun hydro-electricity project want Malaysia and its people to remain backward.

They were not actually environmentalists but people acting for vested economic interests in western countries which did not want Malaysia to compete with their progress, he said.

Dr Mahathir was addressing some 2,000 residents of Bakun at the hydro-electricity project site about 180km north of here.

"Malaysia wants to develop and I say to the so called environmentalists. mind your own business," he said.

The Prime Minister presided at a symbolic rock blasting ceremony to signify startt of work on three tunnels to divert the waters of the Sungai Balui and clear the area for the building to the Bakun Dam which would produce 2,400 megawatts of power.

The RM15 billion project would however submerge the upper reaches of the Sungai Balui for the creation of the reservoir and some 9,000 people living there had been resettled elsewhere.

"We are not destroying, we are building," he said referring to the Bakun Dam.

The Prime Minister pointed out that the hydro method had been long used in the West to produce cheap power and as a result western countries had become developed.

However when countries like Malaysia wanted to implement such projects, groups with vested interests cloaked as environmentalists oppose and reject such programmes, Dr Mahathir said.

"If they want to reject, reject your own hydro power projects first," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the government was implementing the Bakun hydro power project to bring progress to the local people particularly those in Bakun.

"We want them to change their old ways and adopt the new lifestyle," the Prime Minister said.

The local people mostly from the Kenyah and Kayan communities affected by the Bakun project stayed in long houses and practised shifting cultivation.

The Prime Minister wondered aloud as to why the so called environmentalists wanted the local people to remain in loin clothes and practise shifting cultivation.

"Why do they want the Penans to retain the old way of life while the Westerners themselves change and progress. If they think that the jungle life is very good, why don't they return to the primitive age themselves when they stayed in caves," he said.

"I am amazed that there are Malaysians who share the thinking of the so called environmentalists," Dr Mahathir said.

"I hope that the people realise that the so called environmentalists have come here not to help us but to bury us in Bakun soil so that we'll never get to rise up," he added.

Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Haji Abdul Taib Mahmud said the government had undertaken a valuation exercise of the area and the affected people would be given fair compensation.

The Prime Minister's wife Datin Seri Siti Hasmah and the Chief

Minister's wife Puan Sri Laila were among the dignitaries present. --
BERNAMA

AFY AAM