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Mahathir-Projects

MALAYSIA TO DELAY BAKUN AND SEVERAL OTHER BIG PROJECTS

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 4 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight that Malaysia will have to delay several big projects including the RM13.6 billion Bakun hydro-electric project due to the present currency problem.

The Prime Minister indicated that other projects which may also be deferred are the Northern Regional International Airport in Kedah, the Linear City here and the highway linking three highlands in the central main range of the peninsula.

"The (duration of the) delay may depend on how fast we recover," he told a news conference after chairing the Umno Supreme Council meeting at the party's headquarters at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) here.

Dr Mahathir said the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) is among several important projects that would proceed as scheduled.

He also said that efforts would continue to be made to cut costs by scaling down imports especially luxury goods as well as machineries which are already available in the country.

"There are other means of doing things. We may probably produce more gas...we are already, as you know, producing more oil for export in order to earn more foreign exchange.... We are doing quite a few things, some of which we cannot tell you," he said when responding to a question.

On the delay of the Bakun project, Dr Mahathir estimated that it may cost at least 20 per cent more if the Ringgit stays this low depending on how much foreign content was used in the project.

"Obviously we can't build this dam without using some foreign imports," he said.

He however said that the Bakun project could not be scrapped as more than RM100 million had been spent to build the diversion tunnels.

"We may have to delay it for several reasons, among which of course the fact that our currency have depreciated and the cost in terms of Ringgit may be higher. So we may have to stretch it over a longer period and that applies also to other projects," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Ringgit is now devalued and effectively any purchases of imported goods would cost more in Ringgit terms and because of that some of the works would have to be rescheduled and most of these so-called major projects may have to be delayed.

In this respect, the Prime Minister said the people who do not want to see the Bakun project completed by the year 2003 have managed to achieve their goal.

"I congratulate them...they have done a good job. They have been asking us not to do this...we continue (..laughter..) to do this, and then they now succeeded by making us poor.... When we are poor, we can't afford (to continue)," he said. -- BERNAMA

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