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Bakun-Alternatives

NGOS SUGGEST ALTERNATIVES TO BAKUN DAM

KUALA LUMPUR, June 10 (Bernama) -- A group of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) calling itself "Coalition of Concerned NGOs on Bakun" has suggested the government implement energy saving measures and ensure the country's power stations operate at full efficiency as alternatives to building huge hydro-electric dams in the country.

In a statement today, it said such measures had yet to be implemented in Malaysia while countries which had done so had managed to reduce consumption of fuel oils and the cost of generation by energy saving alone.

It said studies had shown that the industrial sector could save up to RM685 million in energy a year if it implements energy saving measures.

"The country has to have an energy needs inventory, not just electricity consumption projections. This means the collection of reliable data on types of energy produceable and the varying amounts used in the country, both domestic and industrial," it said in response to an announcement on Tuesday of the government's decision to revive the deferred Bakun dam project on a smaller scale.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had said that the project in Sarawak's Bakun area would be revived with Tenaga Nasional Berhad to take the leading role and the project would supply power only to Sabah and Sarawak. The project, shelved indefinitely in 1997 at the height of the regional economic crisis, was originally planned to supply power to Peninsular Malaysia as well.

The group said Malaysia had to optimise the match between energy sources and uses to avoid wastage and to tap more renewable sources, adding that hydro-electric dams could not be considered renewable.

Initially, the Bakun dam was supposed to have a capacity of 2,400 megawatt and the area to be flooded, believed to be the size of Singapore, required the displacement of 10,000 indigenous people in 15 longhouses.

" Now that the dam has been scaled down (to 500 MW), there is no longer a need to displace that many opeople," it said.

The group is also against a proposal to revive an aluminium smelter in Bintulu, which was used in the early 80s as the earliest justification for the Bakun dam.

" Aluminium smelting is environmentally toxic and consumes voracious amounts of energy. Why do we need toxic and energy-hungry industries such as aluminium smelters," it said.

According to the group, the world-wide experience with hydro-electric dams had shown that they were "enviromentally destructive" and had a fixed life after which they need to be decommissioned at great costs.

" That is why the World Bank does not finance such dams anymore," it said.

-- BERNAMA

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