

06/01/1999

Resettlement of last Bakun folk by August

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KUCHING, Tues. - The resettlement of residents affected by the now postponed Bakun hydro-electric dam project is progressing smoothly and those living in the last longhouse are scheduled to be resettled by August.

Bakun Resettlement Committee chairman Datuk Dr James Masing said those who had been resettled had generally adapted to their new surroundings very well.

"So far, we have resettled people in six longhouses, including one whose residents were resettled ahead of schedule.

"In fact, the people in several more longhouses also want to be moved ahead of schedule but we cannot accommodate their request as the officers involved in the resettlement exercise are not ready yet while the Land and Survey Department is also not ready to pay them the compensation," he said.

Masing, who is also Tourism Minister, was speaking to reporters after he launched the "Kenali Sarawak/Malaysia" Internet competition organised by Winwin Consult Sdn Bhd at Holiday Inn Kuching today.

The proposed dam project will affect 1,639 families, comprising about 9,500 people from 15 longhouses in Kapit division. A total of 700 families in six longhouses had already been resettled in Sungai Asap.

Masing also made an appeal to all those companies which had been given land to open up plantations in Bakun to start their projects soon.

He lamented that out of the five companies given the green light, only one had started to move into the area and there was no word from the remaining four, including Sarawak Enterprise.

"We (the Government) will sit down and take another look at these companies to see whether they are still interested in these projects. If not, we will award them to someone else."

On the Bakun Trust Fund, he said that so far about RM500,000 had been spent on scholarships for some 130 recipients. But the scholarships for four of them were revoked recently because they failed in their examinations.

Masing also said the fund had not received anything from Bakun Hydro-electric Corporation Berhad which had pledged to donate RM5 million towards the fund.

The pledge was made by businessman Tan Sri Ting Pek Khiing in the presence of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud during the launching of the fund in Sibu in August 1996.

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