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Kenyir Dam and the indirect benefits it has brought to Terengganu

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IF Pas had been ruling Terengganu the past 40 years, most people in the State, especially in the rural areas, will today be living in darkness.

This is because, in a recent ceramah held at Padang Astaka in Setiu, Wan Abdul Muttalib Embong who is State Executive Councillor for Local Government, Housing and Environment pointed out that the construction of the Kenyir Hydro-Electric Dam was a waste of funds and brought little revenue.

Wan Abdul Muttalib, a lawyer, claimed that the Kenyir dam, with an inundated area about three-quarters the size of Penang, could only generate RM5 million in revenue while Kelantan earns some RM120 million from its Pergau hydro-electric dam.

He also painted a gloomy picture of the dam. Should the main dam collapse, Kuala Terengganu would be flooded and property damaged in less than 30 minutes.

He also said the flooding of the dam denied any chance of logging timber or mining for minerals, thus a loss of revenue for the State Government.

The Kenyir dam, which was completed in 1984, comprises twin diversion tunnels, a main dam, a freeflow spillway, an inlet structure leading to four steel-lined tunnels, a conventional surface power station housing four generating units of 100 megawatts each, and eight saddle dams.

From a catchment area of 260,000 hectares, the dam impounds 13.6 billion cubic metres of water at normal full supply level of which 7.4 billion cubic metres are utilised as live storage.

The generating facilities consist of four machines with a total installed capacity of 400 megawatts and produce an average energy output of 1,600 million units per annum.

As for the dam's super structure, 17 million cubic metres of filled material was used during its 2 1/2-year construction.

The core material of weathered granitic clay was placed in the central zone of the dam to act as an impervious layer.

The rockfill for the dam is granite, which extends throughout the entire foundation area. The same core material is used for the eighth saddle dam.

The Kenyir Hydro-electric Dam is the biggest dam in the country. Even the Temenggor hydro-electric dam in Perak is small in comparison.

In any dam construction, no one, especially the owner (Tenaga Nasional Bhd) and the contractor, would use sub-standard materials to hold the large volume of water. Nobody in his or her right mind would want a wanton catastrophe to happen.

It would be a scandal of unimaginable proportion if the Kenyir dam burst and the water rushes downstream to flood low-lying areas.

Why wasn't the fact that the dam had succeeded in reducing flooding since 1986 and preventing loss of property, highlighted?

Wan Abdul Muttalib also missed the point - because of the dam, almost 98 per cent of the population have been enjoying power supply in 1994, not to mention meeting the demand from the industrial sector, which in return generates employment for the people.

Another point the audience was not told about was that the dam also supplies electricity to the national grid to meet the growing need for power by the various sectors in the economy and consumers.

While it is true that the State Government lost several million ringgit in revenue because timber could not be logged, one has to understand the

reason behind the failure.

Former Menteri Besar Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad had said in 1994 that it was earlier projected that the dam would be flooded in 2 1/2 years based on the experience of the smaller Temenggor dam, which was filled in three years.

That 2 1/2-year period was considered ample time for commercial exploitation of the timber but unfortunately, the dam was inundated in less than one year.

This, the speaker did not explain.

But in a Tenaga Nasional briefing on the clearing of Tasik Kenyir to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in February 1991, it was made known that logging in the submerged area during the construction phase of the dam would cost between RM400 million and RM450 million.

Due to the high cost, a decision was made not to log timber.

Also not explained was the fact that the dam had transformed Kuala Berang into a booming town cashing in on the growing tourism industry around Tasik Kenyir.

The potential of the lake as a tourism goldmine also prompted the previous state government to seek allocations from the Federal Government for the second east-west link from Kuala Berang to Sungai Gawi near the dam, to Ipoh in Perak.

The economic spin-off from these developments would ultimately benefit the people as more tourist arrivals meant more business for the rural folk not only to sell their agriculture produce but handicraft as well.

In fact, the Kuala Berang-Sungai Gawi-Ipoh link was called the golden route because of the economic growth potential of the area.

By painting a negative picture of the Kenyir Dam, Pas leaders are looking backwards when it should be trying to improve the infrastructure to further attract investments in the tourism industry.

The Pas leaders could talk about developing the tourism sector and call for the people's participation to improve their livelihood if it wishes to, but that would mean they are no different from Umno or the Barisan Nasional.

Instead, at some ceramah, speakers seem so focused on expressing their disapproval of some of the development projects carried out by the previous administration. These projects have, in fact, benefited the people, among whom are Pas leaders themselves. The Pas Government is no longer the Opposition in Terengganu and should bring further progress to the state.

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