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`Bakun will spur industrial growth'

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KUCHING, Sat. - The construction of the Bakun hydro-electric project will spur industrial growth in Sarawak, Deputy Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr George Chan said today.

"We will be able to provide cheaper power supply to industries, not only in Sarawak but for the whole country," he said.

Dr Chan was speaking after opening the "How Do We Care? HIV/AIDS and Religion Workshop". He was asked to comment on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's statement that the Federal Government would continue with the project which was put on hold during the economic slowdown.

Dr Mahathir had said the Government had not given up on the RM13 billion project as there was a need for it with increasing demand for electricity.

Bakun was initially planned to generate 2,400 megawatts but, recently, the Government had considered scaling it down to about 500 megawatts.

Dr Chan said the State Government was also pleased that the Prime Minister had encouraged the development of energy-intensive projects in Sarawak to make full use of the power that would be available.

Asked when the construction of the dam would begin, Dr Chan said it might begin when the 1.4km-long diversion tunnel was completed early next January.

The latest tunnel is the third and last tunnel to be constructed. Work on the tunnel resumed last October after a delay of almost a year due to the recession which forced former turnkey contractor, Ekran Bhd, to pull out.

By the time the project was suspended at the end of 1998, the tunnel was already 75 per cent completed.

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