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RM16.6b boost for Sarawak economy

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KUCHING, Tues. - Some RM16.6 billion will be pumped into the state economy under the 8th Malaysia Plan, Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud said today.

The figure could go even higher after the midterm review scheduled for next year.

Opening a two-day conference "Sarawak in the 8th Malaysia Plan (2001-2005)", Taib said all development programmes and projects under the plan would bring about long-term benefits.

The conference was organised by the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute (Asli), Institute of Management Sarawak (Masa) and the Sarawak Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI).

Taib's speech was read by Deputy Chief Minister Tan Sri Alfred Jabu Numpang.

Among the priorities will be the development of an efficient and high quality infrastructure, utilities and telecommunication facilities.

"The planning and development of roads, ports, airports as well as telecommunications will be undertaken in a more co-ordinated and integrated approach by taking into consideration the changing needs of users and applications of new technologies," Taib said.

Efforts would also be focused on ensuring sufficient, secure and reliable power supply.

The proposed revival of the 2,400MW Bakun hydroelectric dam project would spur economic development in the State.

"It is hoped that the abundance and comparatively cheaper electricity will attract more investments in the industrial sector, especially energy-intensive industries."

Over the next few years, Sarawak will continue to adopt a slightly different development path than the broad national development agenda as it (State) has many different needs and peculiarities.

"Given our development lag and resource endowments, the State Government will intensify efforts to consolidate the economy."

The main goal would be to transform the State's manufacturing and services sectors into the mainstay of the State's economy within this decade.

The current dependency on sectors such as mining and quarrying, agriculture, forestry and fishing, would not benefit the State in the long term.

"At present, the broad primary sectors contribute a significantly large share to the State's GDP and a large proportion of these commodities is exported in an unprocessed form with low value-added.

"We do not want this situation to prolong."

Masa president Datuk Abang Abdul Karim Tun Abang Openg added that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad recently stated that Sarawak, under Taib's stewardship, could achieve developed status before 2020.

This presented a "great challenge" to the State.

"Let the fulfilment of his (Dr Mahathir's) wish and expectations of Sarawak be our parting gift to our Prime Minister when he retires next October."