

Bakun dam operational by 2011
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The Bakun hydro-electric project in Sarawak is 60 percent completed and is expected to be operational by 2011.

Parliamentary Secretary to the Finance Ministry Dr Hilmi Yahaya told the Dewan Rakyat today that the government has also not decided on whether an undersea cable would be constructed from Bakun to provide electricity to Peninsular Malaysia.

"Studies are still being conducted," he said, in response to queries by Hulu Rajang MP Billy Abit Joo.

Hilmi said there are three main components of the project. The progress of the physical construction of the dam was 66 percent completed while the four turbine units were 70 percent completed.

A secondary set of four turbine units are said to be 42 percent completed.

The main dam is expected to be completed by 2009, while the first turbine unit is expected to be operational by October 2009.

The Bakun dam is expected to be fully operational by May 2011, said Hilmi.

He added that the hydroelectric project had an install capacity of 2400 megawatts and firm capacity of 1773 megawatts, which was smaller than the nation's overall need.

Conflicting report

It was earlier reported that the ambitious US\$2.5 billion project, including the undersea cables, will be completed in 2012.

Energy, Water and Communications Minister Lim Keng Yaik was quoted in Bernama in January as saying that it would take at least five years to install about 700 kilometres of transmission lines and to lay 670 kilometres of undersea cables from Bakun to the southern Johor state.

"Yes, it has too. Sooner or later it will be on. It's part of our planning to bring in hydro power," he said then.

The cable project was originally dropped following the 1997 Asian financial crisis. The dam project has been dogged with delays and setbacks since its approval in 1993. It had been slated to be completed by August 2007.

The dam, which involves flooding an area the size of Singapore, has attracted fierce criticism because of its harmful impact on the environment and the fact that 10,000 residents have already had to evacuate the project site.

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