

Bakun problems will not affect BN's prospect: CM
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The Bakun hydroelectric project, which is linked to the issue of relocation of indigenous residents in Belaga would not threaten the popularity of the Sarawak BN in facing the next elections, said Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud.

Taib, who is also state BN chairman, said he and Prime Minister Najib Razak visited Belaga recently to meet with the longhouse residents in Sungai Asap in an effort to resolve their problems caused by the project.

"The federal and state governments had decided to identify their problems, one of which is their inability to pay their housing loans when the construction of the dam was delayed," he said in a dialogue programme on 'Socio-Economic Development and Sarawak Politics' over Radio Televisyen Malaysia's TV1 last night.

Last Saturday when visiting Belaga, Najib said the federal government had in principle agreed to write off RM41 million, which was the balance of the housing loans of 1,500 families who were relocated to make way for the Bakun project.

Taib said the affected residents who were now staying at the Sungai Asap Resettlement Scheme had not only faced the problem of compensation for their land and houses, but also other problems like business losses as not many people came to Bakun as expected after the project was stalled following the 1997 regional financial crisis.

However, he said, the relocation of the affected residents enabled the project to eventually proceed smoothly.

Two more dams near Bakun

Now the state government is facing competition from outside to buy the RM7.3 billion Bakun project which is owned by Sarawak Hidro Sdn Bhd, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Ministry of Finance Incorporated.

Taib said the state government's proposal had been forwarded to Najib, who is also finance minister, for consideration.

The development in Bakun, located in the Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy (Score), the pillar of Sarawak's economy, will be drawn up not just for the next four years but until 2030.

Taib said the Sarawak government also planned to build two more hydroelectric dams nearby after the Bakun dam, with a 2,400-megawatt capacity, is ready and generating 300MW of electricity by June this year.

- Bernama

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