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Dr M: Adopt Danube River dam model to save forest

KUCHING: Sarawak can avoid flooding large tracts of forest land if it adopts the model of dam construction like that along the Danube River in Europe, said Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The former prime minister said the state, which had built and planned for several more major hydroelectric dam projects, could build high walls on both sides of a river in dam construction to save the forest and reduce the cutting down of trees.

(The Danube River, the second largest river in Europe, flows through nine countries. Several countries have built dams and hydroelectric power plants on the river. The Iron Gate I hydroelectric power plant - the largest dam on the Danube River - was completed in 1972 and has 12 turbines that generate 2.052MW.)

"In Malaysia, we feel that hydro dams should be built across the valley to inundate and flood the forest in order to collect as much water (in a reservoir to generate electricity).

"If you can build dams on both sides of the river, you may not lose any land. You can still have a series of dams," he added in a keynote address on "Harnessing sustainable energy towards 2020" at the International Energy Week hosted by the Sarawak government here yesterday. .

Dr Mahathir said Sarawak had the biggest hydro potential in Malaysia, and that due to its fast industrial development, the state could consume all the hydro power it could generate.

The 2,400MW Bakun dam owned by the Federal Government was the first major dam built in Sarawak. The 944MW Murum dam developed by Sarawak Energy Bhd (SEB) produced its first power last month.

Next on SEB's list is the development of the Baleh and Baram dam projects, which have a designed capacity of 1,200MW each.

The Bakun and Murum dams and the proposed Baleh dam are all located in the upper basin of the Rejang River, Malaysia's longest.

Dr Mahathir said hydro power was one renewable and sustainable energy that did not pollute the environment.

He urged the Government to support research activities on sources of renewable energy to enhance efficiency in harnessing them.

In his presentation on "Transformation of the Malaysian electricity supply industry," Tenaga Nasional Bhd chairman Tan Sri Leo Moggie said unlike Sarawak, peninsular Malaysia had limited hydro potential, with current installed capacity of 1,899MW and another potential 2,000MW to be developed.

He said Sarawak had hydro potential of 20,000MW and that the state's power tariff was the lowest compared to the peninsula and Sabah.

As such, Moggie said Sarawak was the best place for investments in energy-intensive industries, and he urged investors to locate their industries to the Samalaju Industrial Park within the Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy (SCORE).