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Presents

Power and Politics: The Bakun Dam in Sarawak, Malaysia

by

Dr Lee Poh Onn

Date: Wednesday , 05th May 2010
Time: 3.00 to 4.00 pm
Venue: E1-08-25 SDWA Conference Room
National University of Singapore

Abstract

The Malaysian government approved the construction of the Bakun Dam in 1986. Since then, the hydroelectric project has gained international attention because of the controversies surrounding it. Located on the Balui River, a tributary of the Rejang River, the Bakun Hydroelectric Project is some sixty kilometers west of Belaga in Central Sarawak.

In spite of the near completion of the dam, questions have arisen regarding the manner in which the environmental impact assessment was conducted; the relocation of the indigenous communities living in the area; the awarding of the contract to Ekran Berhad in 1994; and the many glitches connected to the project.

Using concepts drawn from new institutional economics, this seminar aims to examine the power differentials existing among the various actors linked to the construction of the dam. The actors fall into two major camps: the state and private interest groups viewed as primarily responsible for fuelling some of the controversies related to the project, on the one hand, and environmental groups and native communities, on the other.

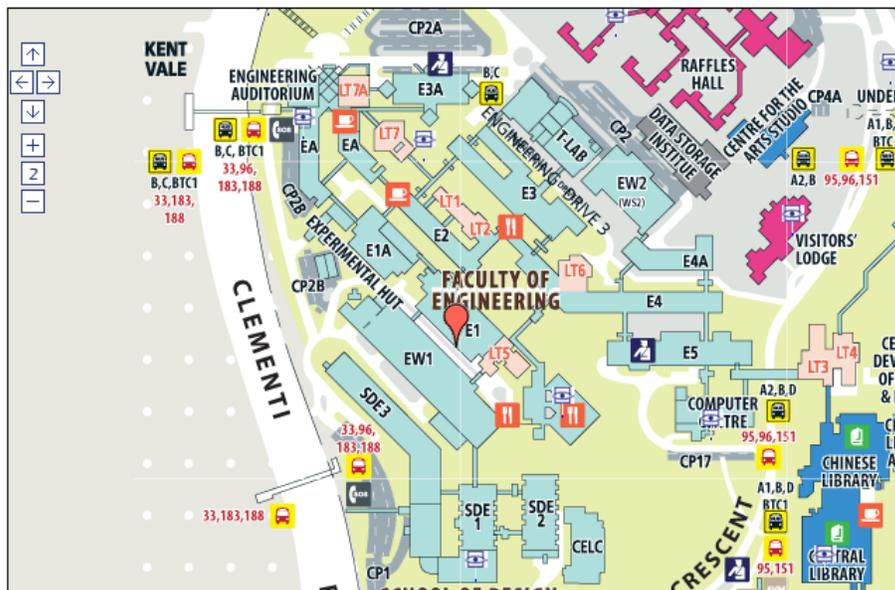
Over the years during which the dam was constructed, the project met with resistance by environmental groups and native communities that kept a constant check on state and business excesses. Although environmental NGOs and various native groups were not successful in preventing the construction of the dam, they were, however, successful in pushing some of their concerns to the forefront and highlighting the necessity to take into account the multifunctional role played by forests.

About the speaker



Dr Lee Poh Onn is Fellow at the Regional Economic Studies Unit at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), Singapore. His research focuses on political economy issues of environmental management in Southeast Asia. The current seminar is based on an extension of his work on forest conflicts in Sarawak, Malaysia.

Map



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