

PM: GOVT SHOULD CONTROL WATER

By Paul Gabriel

ALOR STAR, Fri. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today one "lesson" to be learnt from the drying up of the Durian Tunggal Dam is that water supply is best left to the Federal Government.

The Prime Minister said the state governments should realise that water was vital to all Malaysians, and that "no one state enjoys an advantage over another."

He said a central management of water supply was crucial as the population was expected to reach 70 million by the year 2040.

"At first, our objective was to achieve the 70 million population target by 2100.

"But now that it (the target) is nearer, equal distribution of water for all the people is going to be a major problem," Dr Mahathir told newsmen at the Kepala Batas airport there.

Asked whether the Federal Government would now go ahead and draw up legislation for central management of water, he replied:

"It is our view that water supply should consider the interest of all the people.

"There are states with a lot of water but a small population and vice-versa. If we do not (act) to ensure fair distribution, it is going to be a problem," he said.

On whether Malacca

Chief Minister Tan Sri Haji Abdul Rahim Tamby Chik should also be blamed for the sudden loss of water in the dam, he said there would be no end to the accusations then.

"In fact, as a democratically elected government, I should also be held responsible (for the dry-up).

"But it is going to be difficult if you expect me or Tan Sri Rahim to measure the level of the dam ourselves.

"We can only act based on the reports and feed-

back we receive from our officers. If we have to act on our own, then there is no need for reports at all," he said.

The Malacca State Inquiry Report had identified mismanagement, incompetence, indifference and an overall mess in the administration system of the Malacca Water Authority (LAM) as the causes of the water crisis.

Tan Sri Rahim had on Wednesday said the competency of LAM staff was "shockingly low."