

10/04/1997

40 more pipes to reduce Tasik Chini level faster

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KUANTAN, Wed. - Forty more pipes to siphon excess water from Tasik Chini to Sungai Pahang will be in operation from tomorrow.

These are in addition to the 16 already there.

State Culture, Arts and Tourism Committee chairman Datuk Shahiruddin Ab Moin said today with this measure, the water level was expected to fall to the desired level sooner than expected.

At present, the water level is 2.8m. The desired level is 1.4m.

"The Drainage and Irrigation Department has estimated that it will take eight weeks from tomorrow for the water level to go down to the desired level."

He was speaking to reporters after the State Executive Council meeting chaired by Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohd Khalil Yaakob.

However, it will take a longer time for the work to be completed if it rains during the period.

The lake surface covers only 240ha of the entire 12,600ha gazetted Tasik Chini catchment area.

Shahiruddin said the executive council today discussed at length the environmental degradation at Tasik Chini caused by a dam. The problem was highlighted by the New Sunday Times on its front page on April 6.

The RM1 million dam, built in 1994, was to raise the water level of Sungai Chini to enable boatmen to ferry more tourists two kilometres upstream the Sungai Pahang tributary which leads to the lake.

Instead of raising the water level just enough for the boats to pass through without hindrances, the dam has caused the lake level to go up by three metres, flooding the surrounding forests.

Many trees have died and a recent report estimated that the area affected to be around 60ha.

The idea to use the "cheap and practical" siphoning method was suggested by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad when he visited the lake on March 17.

Southeast Pahang Regional Development Authority general manager Mohamad Yusof Johor, when briefing Dr Mahathir on the environmental degradation at the lake, had outlined three measures to reduce the water level.

Constructing an RM3 million bypass and building a RM4.5 million water lock-gate were two of the measures proposed.

Shahiruddin said once the water level reached the desired level, the technical committee formed by the State Government would inspect the area to decide on other rehabilitation measures.

The committee comprises representatives from the DID, Public Works Department, Southeast Pahang Regional Development Authority, and the Arts, Culture and Tourism Ministry.

He said the technical committee would also convene a meeting with non-governmental organisations to get their inputs before work to restore the lake back to its original state was carried out.

The NGOs include the Pahang Tourism Promotion Association, Wetlands International Asia Pacific and Malaysian Nature Society.

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