

17/04/1997

Height of Chini dam to be lowered

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KUANTAN, Wed. - The State Government will reduce by 1.4 metres the height of a dam across the estuary of Sungai Chini as a "temporary solution" to reduce the water level in Tasik Chini, the country's second largest natural lake.

Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohd Khalil Yaakob said work on the 3.7-metre dam would be carried out within the next one month.

"This is a temporary solution to reduce the water level in the lake," he told reporters after chairing the State Executive Council meeting at Wisma Sri Pahang here.

Khalil said work to reduce the height of the dam would be carried out by the State Drainage and Irrigation Department. The project would cost about RM200,000.

Tasik Chini was flooded as a result of the construction of the dam which was built in 1994 to raise the level of Sungai Chini. This was to enable boatmen to ferry tourists two kilometres upstream to the lake.

The construction of the dam then cost RM1 million.

However, instead of raising the water to a level where boats can easily pass without hindrance, the dam caused it to go up by three metres and flooded the surrounding forests.

Many trees died and a recent report estimated the affected area at 60 hectares.

Khalil said the water level in the lake had also increased by another 10cm due to the rainy season despite efforts to pump out the excess water.

"We have to lower the wall as the rainy weather is causing the water level to increase," he said.

Last Wednesday, State Culture, Arts and Tourism Committee chairman Datuk Shahiruddin Abdul Moin said 40 pumps to siphon excess water from Tasik Chini to Sungai Pahang would be put in operation to reduce the water level.

These are in addition to the 16 already in place.

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.

Once the water level reaches the desired level of 1.4 metres, a 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.

The technical committee is also expected to convene a meeting with non-governmental organisations to get their input before work to restore the lake back to its original state is carried out.

Khalil said the authorities were also studying the possibility of constructing a 50-metre canal at the Sungai Chini estuary to allow water flowing from the Sungai Chini into Sungai Pahang to by-pass the dam.

The diversion canal, costing about RM2 million, is one of two measures that the State Government is proposing for implementation to the Economic Planning Unit at the Prime Minister's Department.

The construction of a flow-gate was also being proposed along the canal to facilitate control of the water level.

Last Friday, the Consumers' Association of Penang said an inquiry should

be held to determine the parties responsible for the environmental damage at Tasik Chini.

Its president S.M. Mohd Idris said the association had alerted the Southeast Pahang Regional Development Authority and Pahang Department of Environment on the dam's threat to the lake's environment in September 1995 but its advice was not heeded.

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