

30/04/1998

Cabinet `yes' to National Water Council

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - The Cabinet today approved the establishment of a National Water Council which will jointly plan and develop the country's water resources with State Governments, Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu said. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will chair the council whose members will comprise Menteri Besar and Chief Ministers and several ministers.

"Almost all the States have agreed to the setting up of the council," Samy Vellu told reporters after opening the annex of the Sekolah Rendah Jenis Kebangsaan Castlefield in Puchong, near here.

"We'll hold discussions as soon as possible."

The establishment of the council did not mean the Federal Government would be taking over States' water rights, Samy Vellu said.

"The Federal Government is not taking over the water rights of any State. But when one State buys water from another, the buyer-State will have to pay. We'll fix the rates and from where water can be taken."

Setting up the council did not require any amendment to the Federal Constitution, he said.

On the council's inaugural meeting, Samy Vellu said he would discuss with the Prime Minister a suitable date for it.

He said that at the ministry's weekly meeting today he had directed the Public Works Department director-general to prepare a working paper for discussion with the Menteri Besar and Chief Ministers.

Samy Vellu said the ministries involved would also hold a meeting soon and the outcome would be tabled at the council's inaugural meeting.

Responding to a question, the Minister denied that the Selangor Waterworks Department had allowed siphoning of water from fire hydrants.

"I've asked the department to investigate and take action. This is like stealing water."

Samy Vellu said he had received feedback that tankers had siphoned water from fire hydrants in remote areas and sold them for RM500 to RM1,000.

At another function, Samy Vellu said supplying water to reservoirs with low water level was not a good idea.

He said this was because there were no available resources from which the water could be pumped out.

"It would be too costly to pump water into the reservoirs. It is cheaper to treat the water and transport it to the homes," he told reporters after attending a variety show organised by the MIC's Sri Sabah Baru branch to raise funds for the party's education arm, the Maju Institute of Education Development.

Samy Vellu, who is also MIC president, said whatever method was carried out to overcome the present water shortage problem affecting several States was "the correct solution."

He said this when asked to comment on a letter to the NST on Tuesday by a reader from Petaling Jaya.

In the letter, Dr Fadhlullah Suhaimi Abdul Malek had suggested that instead of using tankers to supply water, the water should be pumped into reservoirs to maintain water level and lower the cost of operations.

(END)