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Discard parochial interests

AT LONG LAST, a consensus has been reached among state governments on the urgent need to set up a national water council.

It is a pity that the long delay has been, in part, due to some misunderstanding and fears on the part of the various state governments that a central agency would usurp their constitutional rights over water. But as Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad pointed out, there is no intention by the federal government to usurp the powers of the states. It is only to coordinate the supply of water so that states with excess water can channel it to others which are facing a problem.

Still, it is better late than never. Let us hope that all parties would now move speedily to ensure that the national water council is set up and gets down to its tasks as quickly as possible.

The proposal for a national water council has taken on greater urgency in the wake of the current dry spell. The water shortage in the Klang Valley and some states has inconvenienced thousands of households and affected businesses including factories.

The sad point is, did we really have to wait until we are hit by a crisis to realise that a national water council is important? If a centrally co-ordinated water supply system had been put in place earlier, perhaps we would not be in this predicament now.

It is quite understandable that a state which is endowed with natural resources such as crude oil, minerals, forests or water would want to protect these rights and to maximise them to the fullest.

But Malaysia is a relatively small country and it would be foolhardy to think that what affects one state will not affect another.

Forest fires, diseases, the haze and even natural calamities such as floods do not respect state boundaries.

In such instances, a concerted effort by the whole nation is needed to tackle a problem. That is why co-operation between the states and the federal government is vital to avert a national crisis.

There is a lesson to be learnt from this water shortage. After 40 years of independence, we should reject parochial views in favour of national interests.

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