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Inter-state water supply guidelines still being drafted

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THE Public Works Department (PWD) is still drafting the guidelines for proposals concerning the inter-state water movement project, which is the National Water Resource Council's solution to ensure adequate water supply throughout the country by the year 2004.

"We are still in the process of outlining the details of the requirements for the project. We expect design work for the project to begin only next year," an official of the department said.

The department was instructed by the National Water Resource Council in June to come up with guidelines such as how much a recipient state will have to pay for water from another state.

The inter-state water movement project is to see that states with excess water supply them to those facing a shortage.

The PWD official, who declined to be named, said details of water charges can be worked out as the project goes on.

He said work to prepare the outlines of the project is taking a long time because every proposal needs approval from all state governments. "The work is done on a consensus basis with state governments, and we need their consent for each proposal."

The official said the first phase of the project will begin with tunnelling work to channel water from resource-rich Pahang to Selangor which has the country's biggest demand for fresh water.

This phase of the project is expected to take four years to complete, involving digging a 37km tunnel to bring water from Pahang catchment areas to fill three dams in Selangor - Klang Gates, Semenyih and Sungai Langat.

The second phase of the project will channel excess water from Perak to Penang and Kedah, the official said.

Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu said on Thursday that up to five companies are expected to submit plans to the Economic Planning Unit for the RM2 billion first phase of the project that will be privatized.

The National Water Resource Council, chaired by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, was set up after many parts of the country suffered serious water shortages between March and July this year. The worst shortages occurred in the Klang Valley.

At the council's first meeting last June, several issues were discussed, including the mode and structure of payments for various types of water consumption, such as domestic usage, power generation and agriculture.

There is currently an agreement to divert supply to water-deficient states but charges will have to be worked out, Dr Mahathir had said.

The distance from the sources of water to the receiver cropped up because tunnelling might be required to channel the water. It was also decided that the Federal Constitution need not be amended to facilitate the establishment of the council.

Ministries represented in the council include the Works Ministry, Primary Industries Ministry, Science, Technology and Environment Ministry, Agriculture Ministry and Energy, Communications and Multimedia Ministry (formerly Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Ministry).

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