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States agree to set up water council (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - State Governments, which in the past refused any form of central co-ordination for water supply management, have now agreed that there is an urgent need to set up a National Water Council.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today this was despite their earlier fear that a central agency would usurp their constitutional rights over water.

The council is expected to co-ordinate water supply management nationwide so that certain States can supply water to others.

Speaking to reporters after opening a seminar on "Virtual Reality" at the Mines Exhibition Centre, Dr Mahathir said:

"We have tried for a long time to set up a water council but the States wanted to protect their rights. That was the problem then.

"We have no intention to take over their powers. We only want to co-ordinate (the supply of water) so that States which have excess water can channel it to other States which are facing a shortage.

"We are living in the same country, but the States felt that water was under their jurisdiction and were not very interested in supplying it to other States. However, we have spoken to the State Governments.

"They understand the problem and are now co-operating with us."

The Works Ministry has been directed by the Cabinet to prepare a working paper on the setting up of the council which is expected to be represented by officials from the Federal and State Governments.

He said that although it had been some time since the States accepted that there was a need for a central co-ordinating agency, they did not consider it as urgent.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, said the issue was also raised among Menteris Besar during an Umno supreme council meeting.

Replying to a question, he said the water shortage was not affecting investment in the country.

"I don't think it will affect the flow of investments because (for) future investments, we will make provisions for that. This is an unusual period. We don't get this kind of drought every year."

Asked whether State water management was also to blame for the problem, he said some States could not possibly predict the prolonged drought this time around.

"Since water is under State jurisdiction, some States would have thought that they were sufficiently prepared for the worst."

On whether industries had been asked to cut down production or shut down due to water shortage, the Prime Minister said:

"I don't know whether they have been asked to do so, but I think they must make provision for that."

To another question on whether the water shortage would affect supply to Singapore, Dr Mahathir said he did not think so.

"We have enough water. The water shortage is in some places. So far, there is no drying up of catchment areas that supply water to Singapore, so there is no problem."

Malaysia supplies 214 million litres of raw water daily to Singapore.

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