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States Yes to water pact, no charter changes: PM

Kamarul Yunus

ALL states have agreed to cooperate to facilitate inter-state water distribution and supply and there is no need to amend respective state constitutions, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

Speaking to reporters after chairing the inaugural National Water Council meeting in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, Dr Mahathir said the council members, especially state governments also agreed to rename the council the National Water Resources Council.

For this purpose, he said, council members agreed on the setting up of a secretariat to be based at the Works Ministry in Kuala Lumpur.

Apart from this, Dr Mahathir said, the council also discussed issues pertaining to the inter-state water distribution and supply, including methods of inter-state transfer of water and charging for raw or treated water.

He said the meeting also deliberated on domestic water consumption and the wide range of water usage such as for power-generation and agriculture.

"However, council members have yet to reach any decision pertaining to such issues and hope to conclude discussions after a working paper on those subjects is completed.

"We only discussed and did not make any decision as some of the council members think there is no need to pay for raw water, while others suggest payment," he said, adding that the secretariat has been entrusted to undertake the task of completing the working paper.

Dr Mahathir said although the Government has not fixed any deadline for the secretariat to complete the working paper, the Public Works Department had already started its own study pertaining to the matter and is expected to complete it by the end of the year.

Several matters, he said, have to be taken into consideration to ensure the effectiveness of any effort to implement inter-state water supply.

For instance, Dr Mahathir said, there was some agreement that in the case of a river flowing from one state to another, benefits brought to both states should be taken into account.

Citing an example, he said, Kedah supplies water to Penang for free but charges for water it supplies to Perlis.

"Such too is the case with Johor which supplies water to Malacca for a certain fee. But Negri Sembilan, which also supplies water to Malacca, does not charge anything," he added.

On whether the establishment of the National Water Resources Council means water supply is now under the purview of the Federal Government, Dr Mahathir said it is still the responsibility of the state government and there is no need to amend the Constitution.

He also said there is no need for a national water grid, similar to the national grid for electricity supply because cooperation mostly involves two or three states.

Dr Mahathir, when asked about efforts taken to ensure adequate supply in view of the current water shortage, said all concerned must prevent wastage and ensure maximum water usage.

"There is water ... but there is a lot of wastage such as pipe leakages," he said, adding that state governments have also pledged to ensure there will not be any development at water catchment areas.

Also present at the meeting were menteri besar and chief ministers or

their representatives and several ministers, including Datuk Seri Samy Vellu (Works), Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik (Primary Industry), Datuk Law Hieng Ding (Science, Technology and Environment) and Datuk Amar Dr Sulaiman Daud (Agriculture).

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