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Water supply: Need for better coordination

THE Federal Government does not intend to take over the management of water supply from state governments but wants to ensure better coordination in the supply, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

In fact, Dr Mahathir said, the Federal Government foresees that the cooperation between states in coordinating the supply of water can be achieved within a short period.

"We can channel the water supply from Kedah, Perak, Penang or Pahang to Selangor which is facing acute water shortage. In fact, we are already trying to channel water supply up to Kuala Lumpur.

"It may cost a little bit because it has to go across mountains to bring water from other states but we can do it," he told newsmen after delivering a keynote address at the opening of a three-day seminar on virtual reality in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Unlike previously where the state governments declined to surrender the "power" to supply water to the Federal Government, Dr Mahathir said the former now accept the fact that there is an urgent need for better coordination among states in the water supply.

"The state governments are now more concerned over the water shortage and will cooperate to solve the problem.

"We have informed the state governments (the menteri besar and chief ministers) like during the Umno supreme council meeting last week. They understand and will cooperate," he added.

On the proposed setting up of a National Water Supply Council, Dr Mahathir said the idea has been mooted a long time ago but has yet to take off because all the states declined to surrender the "power" of water supply to the Federal Government.

"We (Federal Government) have no intention of taking over the power of the state governments, merely wanting to coordinate the supply from states which are having more than enough water to those facing acute shortage.

"While we are staying in one country, the states think that water supply is under their respective jurisdiction and they are not interested to supply to other states," he added.

Asked why the state governments were slow to respond to the proposal when they have been warned earlier on the possible water shortage due to the El-Nino phenomenon, Dr Mahathir said they (state governments) did not predict that the drought season would prolong.

"We did warn them many years ago, especially when we felt that Kuala Lumpur is growing at a rapid pace and needed adequate supply of water and electricity.

On whether there is a directive to industries to cut down or seek other sources of water supply, Dr Mahathir said he was not aware of any but did not rule out the need for such provision.

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

"In some cases, the industries dig their own wells and use the water but we cannot have too many of that," he said, adding this will also affect the growth in investment because future investment will also take this into consideration.

He said industries and investors should be reminded that the current drought season is "unusual" and has never ever happened in this country.

Dr Mahathir also reiterated that the Government will not cut down water supply to Singapore because the country still has adequate supply of water.

"We will not cut down but will continue supplying water. We have enough water but only water shortage in some places.

"So far, there is no drying up of catchment areas that affects the supply of water to Singapore," he added.

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