

30/06/1998

Water Resource Council formed (HL)

Rashid Yusof

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - The National Water Resource Council was set up today with the backing of State Governments to ensure adequate water supply throughout the country in the future.

The council, previously proposed to be named as the National Water Council, will also address a wide range of issues concerning inter-State water movement.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who chaired the meeting, said the issue was about channelling supply from States with excess water to those facing a shortage.

He said there was an agreement to divert supply to water-deficient States, but the charges would have to be worked out.

Today's meeting, while not making many specific decisions, discussed a gamut of issues.

"We can't resolve everything in one meeting," Dr Mahathir told a Press conference after the two-hour meeting.

Amid concern by some States over possible loss of revenue, Dr Mahathir said a paper would now be prepared by the Public Works Department - made the secretariat at the meeting - to outline details like charges.

Among the few things already sorted out was that unlike transmission of power there was no need for a national grid for water.

"Each arrangement will cover two or three States," Dr Mahathir said.

He said issues to be tackled included how to divert water from one State to another, and whether any payment was involved.

Also discussed was the issue of the mode of payment and the structure for various consumption of water - for domestic usage, power generation and agriculture. The distance from the sources of water to the receiver also cropped up because tunnelling might be required to channel the water.

"We have not made any decisions ... all these have to be discussed further," Dr Mahathir said.

At the Press conference, the Prime Minister explained at length the question of possible loss of revenue, which had been the concern of some States.

He said: "Yes, we discussed the matter but no decision was made because there was this view that no charges should be levied on untreated water. Others said both untreated and treated water should be paid for.

"Some pointed out that while some rivers pass through a few States, States receiving the water (where the river ends) are not paying the States where the river originates...

"For instance, Kedah supplies water to Penang for free. On the other hand, Kedah collects payment for supplying water to Perlis."

Likewise, Johor provides water to Malacca, but although the river also passes through Negri Sembilan, only Johor is being paid.

The meeting also decided that the Federal Constitution need not be amended to facilitate the establishment of the council.

Dr Mahathir said the council aimed to provide long-term solutions. Local solutions were found to overcome immediate problems such as that in the Klang Valley where, as the Prime Minister pointed out, rain was filling up the dams again.

The meeting was attended by Menteri Besar and Chief Ministers or their representatives. Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, Primary Industries Minister Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik, Science, Technology and

Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding and Agriculture Minister Datuk Amar Dr Sulaiman Daud were also present.

(END)