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Dr M: Kedah should charge Penang for water

By Noor Adzman Baharuddin

ALOR STAR, Thurs. - The State Government has been urged to charge the Penang State Government for raw water it has been supplying free-of-charge.

Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in making the call, also urged the State Government to raise the annual RM10,000 "lease" payment for Penang island and Province Wellesley (as Seberang Prai was known then) to a more reasonable rate.

"Unlike Kedah, Penang is a rich State. Kedah wants to become a developed State by 2010, but doesn't have much funds to spur the economy.

"So the State Government must seriously consider charging Penang for raw water and raising the lease amount," he said at a thank you dinner organised by the State Government here last night in recognition of his contributions to the State during his tenure as Prime Minister.

Dr Mahathir said his call for Kedah to charge Penang for raw water was more pressing considering the nation's water supply would be privatised soon.

"I don't think it is fair for a third party to reap the profits from the free water supplied by Kedah. Even the Johor State Government is charging three sen per 1,000 gallons of raw water to Singapore and 30 sen per 1,000 gallons of untreated water to Malacca.

"However, Kedah had never asked for a single sen from Penang. I am not trying to instigate the Kedah State Government, but Kedah is a poor State compared to Penang and yet it provides raw water for free.

"I feel this is not right and unfair," he said to a thunderous applause from the 1,000 guests, who included the Sultan of Kedah and the Sultanah.

Accompanying Dr Mahathir was his wife, Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali.

On the annual lease payment, Dr Mahathir said Kedah was tricked by the British then when they paid the rental in Straits Dollars instead of Spanish Dollars.

"I have done my home work on this. The Colonial Government then was to have paid 6,000 Spanish Dollars for Penang island and 4,000 Spanish Dollars for Province Wellesley, which is equivalent to about RM100,000, but instead made the payment in Straits Dollars.

"The present RM10,000 lease is not even enough to buy a low-cost house," he said.

Dr Mahathir also expressed his thanks to the State Government, its leaders and the people for their support when he was Prime Minister.

In Penang, Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon met with several State Executive Councillors over Dr Mahathir's remarks.

Sources said Koh is expected to call for a Press conference tomorrow to announce the decisions made at the meeting.

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