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`Let us not discuss water payment'

PENANG, Sat. - Let's stop the water payment talks, said Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon.

Instead, Penang and Kedah should look at the big picture, at how close the two States have always been, he said.

Stressing once again that Sungai Muda was a common river flowing between the two States, he said it would be difficult for Penang to work out how much it should pay for the raw water from Kedah..

"Let us not discuss this further. It is not the right thing to do. The two States have complemented each other' efforts towards improving the prosperity of the nation.

"We have always had a close relationship and Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's recent comments only serve to remind us of this closeness," he told reporters after officiating the 5th biennial annual general meeting of the Society of the Blind, Malaysia at the Kompleks Tabung Haji in Bayan Lepas here.

More than 450 members from all over Malaysia attended the two-day meeting which began today.

Koh was earlier asked if Penang was prepared to pay for raw water from Kedah if it was requested to do so by the latter.

Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain, who was also asked this yesterday, said the State was still trying to determine the method and amount of payment for raw water to Penang.

He said when Kedah agreed to supply Penang with raw water free-of-charge years ago, it was meant for domestic and agricultural use.

"Penang has since diversified its economy and is now using a lot of water for its industrial estates," he was quoted as saying after opening the Kilang Ais Umno branch meeting in Kuala Kedah.

Koh's immediate response was that Penang's industrial development had contributed towards the expansion of industries in Kedah.

"Penang will continue to participate in any activity which will benefit the two States in future. Let us work for the people in both States," he added.

At today's function, Koh presented the society's excellence quality award (individual category) to Mohamed Ismail from Kuala Terengganu.

The 52-year-old Mohamed was recognised for introducing reflexology courses to the blind and establishing a braille library and several computer centres along the east coast.

Earlier, Koh said the State Government would seriously consider the requests by society members to improve their quality of life.

"The State Government is more than willing to help. Submit the details on your requests so that we can address the issues more effectively," he said.

The society, headed by president Mah Hassan Omar, has branches in 11 States and more than 3,000 registered members.

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