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`Koh had agreed to water proposal'

ALOR STAR, Tues. - Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain today said Penang Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon had agreed in principle to the Kedah Government's proposal for charges to be imposed on raw water taken from the State.

"He (Koh) had agreed to it when we discussed the matter more than three years ago," he said.

"The verbal agreement was followed by discussions between the Kedah State Secretary and his Penang counterpart and between the directors of the two State Economic Planning Units."

Syed Razak said Penang had hosted the first meeting and Kedah was to host the next, but the parties had postponed the meeting indefinitely due to other work commitments.

"I am surprised at Koh's suggestion that there was no need to discuss our proposal," he said.

Syed Razak was asked to comment on Koh's suggestion to him that the water talks, raised by the Menteri Besar following former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's call for the Kedah State Government to start charging Penang for raw water, be dropped.

The Menteri Besar, adamant that Koh should live up to his word, insisted that Penang State Government should pay for the raw water.

Describing Kedah raw water as a khazanah rakyat (people's heritage), he said the Kedah Government was duty bound to demand payment from Penang for the benefit of the people.

"After my discussions with Dr Koh then, the Kedah State Government set up the Syarikat Air Kedah Sdn Bhd and started building two water treatment plants in Pinang Tunggal (on the Kedah side at the Kedah-Penang border) and in Sanglang, near Alor Star.

"The State Government had hoped the company would manage all activities relating to raw water supply for the State.

"However, both Dr Koh and I, as well as our officers, got sidetracked by other commitments, including preparations for the general election.

"Now, we intend to pursue the matter and I know Dr Koh can appreciate our intention especially when the income from the sale of the raw water can spur Kedah's economy."

Asked to comment on Koh's claim that it was difficult to work on the water rates considering Kedah and Penang shared a common river flowing between the two States he said: "The bulk of the water comes from Pedu lake which we created by damming up 400,000 hectares of virgin forest."

Asked to comment on Koh's claim that Penang's industrial development had contributed towards the expansion of industries in Kedah, Syed Razak said Kedah had also done a lot for Penang.

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