

## **S'gor water 'crisis': Better alternatives to Langat 2**

**MalaysiaKini.com**

**Aug 6, 2012**

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A few days ago, as reported in The Star, the Deputy Prime Minister, Muhyiddin Yassin, after chairing the cabinet meeting, declared that he wanted the Selangor Langat 2, costing RM8.65 billion, to be fully implemented without further delay.

Realising that the federal government has no power to force the Selangor government to start construction of the Langat 2 treatment plant and other ancillary works which are sited in Selangor, he has instructed the attorney-general to look at the federal constitution and other legal documents to find a way out of this dilemma.

Most Malaysians will wonder why the BN government is in such a great hurry to act on this project especially since it will take several years to implement and will have no immediate impact on the so-called water crisis in Selangor.

In fact, there is no water crisis but the BN government just wants to create some fear and to justify a highly questionable public investment decision.

As reported in a prominent business daily recently, although 50 percent of the 45km tunnel has been completed to carry water from Sungai Semantan in Pahang, construction of the Langat 2 treatment plant has not started.

If the treatment plant is not completed, the water from Pahang has nowhere to go and the partially completed tunnel and other completed construction will remain white elephants.

Bad intentions behind Langat 2?

Suspicious of bad intentions in this massive and extraordinary public infrastructure arise for several reasons.

One reason is that Selangor is an opposition-ruled state and we know that BN desperately wants to show how badly the state is run by Pakatan.

Hence, the decision to rush the project is to score political points especially since the elections are fast approaching.

However, a more important reason is that the Langat 2 project will be one of the largest water projects in the country. There will be billions of ringgit of contracts to give out.

We all know the bad track record of the BN government with respect to super expensive projects in the name of privatisation. Basically, what will happen is that a large part of the Langat 2 project will be outsourced to politically connected business and rentier individuals and groups.

'Piratisation' will take place but this will be spun off in the mainstream media as an Economic Transformation Programme privatisation project to resolve the water problems of the state which have been caused by Pakatan mismanagement.

#### Origin of the Langat 2 project

Also, let us not forget the origins of the Langat 2 project. This was a project initiated by the former state government under Menteri Besar Khir Toyo who believed that the solution to Selangor's water problem was to transfer water from Sungei Semantan in Pahang.

To accomplish this transfer, a new dam - Kelau Dam -also has to be constructed to accumulate water to be pumped to the Langat 2 treatment plant.

It is a fact that few members of the public if asked their opinion of the previous state government's record on clean and frugal governance will have anything good to say about Khir and his state exco members.

#### Alternative approaches

The present Selangor Menteri Besar Khalid Ibrahim has clearly stated that Selangor is not in urgent need for more water and that there are cheaper schemes to secure additional water.

After careful consideration of the two conflicting approaches to resolving Selangor's water problem - that of the BN and the present Selangor state government - I and water engineer colleagues whom I have consulted, strongly believe that there is a superior and cheaper way to supply additional water to Selangor than transferring water from Pahang through the proposed Langat 2 scheme.

One of the alternative proposals is to take water from Sungei Bernam, the river that forms the state boundary between Selangor and Perak. If readers look at Google maps, they will notice that the upper reach of Sungei Bernam is in Selangor.

This area is a possible area where a dam can be constructed to accumulate water to increase water supply.

At the lower end of Sungei Bernam is Sungei Besar where a suitable water treatment plant can be constructed to pipe water to nearby Kuala Selangor and Klang.

#### Sungei Perak

Another alternative source of water is the mouth of Sungei Perak, at Teluk Intan which is very much closer to the main demand areas in Selangor than the Langat project.

Since the level of these coastal regions is about the same it would be much cheaper to take additional water from Sungei Perak than from Sungei Semantan in Pahang through a highly expensive tunnel that has to be cut in the mountainous Main Range.

Sungei Perak at the point of its mouth is several hundred metres wide and there is ample water to meet Selangor's need for the long term future.

All these alternatives need to be explored by the Selangor as well as the federal government before a final decision is made on a project to definitively and economically resolve the state's water needs.

Common sense and rationality must prevail and not the crony ridden business as usual decision making which has earned Malaysia a reputation as a paradise for mismanagement and high level corruption.

Consumers must bear in mind that the BN government will make you pay a higher water rate if the Langat 2 project is fully completed. You can stop it.

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Source: <http://www.malysiakini.com/news/205565>