

Issuing free water is a populist and irresponsible move

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The current spat between BN and Pakatan Rakyat leaders regarding the budgetary "possibility" of providing free water to consumers is missing the point raised by environmentalists when we were opposing the Sungai Selangor dam.

Certainly, a precious social utility such as water should belong to the people and not to private interests. Water is a public good and it is the people's right to have access to clean water and to ensure that the sources of clean water are properly protected.

The Sungai Selangor dam has not only destroyed irrevocably a region of pristine natural environment in Kuala Kubu Baru, but has destroyed the ancestral homes of the Orang Asli who lived there.

Selangor rate payers are now paying the price of the dam.

During our campaign against the dam, we stressed the urgent need to focus on water demand management. Water demand management includes targets set for per capita water use, and reductions in non-revenue water.

Giving away free water makes a mockery of water demand management. In fact, water demand management would involve making sure those who wash their precious cars everyday pay MORE for the luxury.

That may not be populist but it is what we expect of a responsible government that protects our resources and does not tell us that we need to pay for yet another dam because the current reservoirs are inadequate.

When Malaysians start collecting our plentiful rain water for their gardening and cleaning needs, only then will we be on our way to becoming an environmentally-conscious people and towards having a sustainable lifestyle.

Malaysia is blessed to be among the countries in the world with abundant rain water, yet we are also the worst squanderers of this natural resource.

A comprehensive water policy would include changes to building by-laws, through subsidising the installation of water-saving devices in business and residential properties and through giving industry incentives to switch to water-efficient technologies.

As the richest state in Malaysia, Selangor rate payers expect the best quality of life and the best standard of governance to go with it. The current debates about whether the state is going bankrupt do not humour us.

The Deputy Prime Minister may have his own agenda, but PKR's own leader, Azmin Ali's warning to the state government at the state assembly yesterday that it's spendthrift ways have to stop does not speak well of sustainable governance in the state.

He mentioned an instance of the state government spending RM500,000 on a single official ceremony and that the state reserves have dipped below RM800 million. I still remember the Pakatan Rakyat state assembly speaker telling off the state exco Ronnie Liu for spending RM10,000 on durian feasts for his constituents.

Who knows what else goes on. Is this corruption, or do free handouts count as corruption only when they are given out close to an election?

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