

No need to ration water now, says DPM
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By Lisa J. Ariffin

PUTRAJAYA, July 23 — There will be no water rationing in Selangor, Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya at present, but utility firm Syarikat Bekalan Air Selangor (Syabas) must have ready a back-up plan to overcome shortages in some areas, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said today.

The deputy prime minister moved to assure residents in the three areas after Selangor's sole distribution company had warned two weeks ago that it might have to start rationing water due to near zero reserves at the Selangor's water treatment plants.

"So no catuan (rationing) but selected areas where (there is a shortage) of water and water (is) not forthcoming, Syabas will supply water so consumers will have no problem," Muhyiddin (picture) told reporters after chairing a meeting of the special Cabinet committee on Selangor's water issue here.

"Overall, we feel there must be a contingency plan to overcome the water problem in these three districts. Some treatment plants have overloaded (their) capacity... some plants work 24 hours... if that's the case maybe face problems in the future," he said.

Muhyiddin also said that the Cabinet committee will meet Syabas in the next few days to discuss the contingency plans.

Critics of Syabas and its parent company Puncak Niaga were quick to question whether the water crisis was "manufactured" and a ploy to hasten construction of the RM3.6 billion Langat 2 water treatment plant which they speculate Puncak Niaga would be eyeing to operate.

And while the state, private water concessionaires and the federal government play the blame game over the purported impending water shortage, the war of words has left Selangor and KL residents worrying about their water supply which could become an election issue depending on who they believe is responsible for any cuts.

Muhyiddin also announced today that Putrajaya has agreed to build the treatment plant despite the Pakatan Rakyat state government's objections.

Muhyiddin said the Langat 2 project was important to prevent Selangor, Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya from reaching critical water supply levels by 2014.

He also said Putrajaya will refer the Selangor government's planned takeover of Syabas to the Attorney-General as it involved legal technicalities.

On July 16, Selangor announced it will take over Syabas's operations to avert a purported supply crisis that has been described as "suspicious" by Menteri Besar Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim.

He said the early audit reports showed that Syabas was not handling its capital expenditure well.

Khalid also said legal action would be taken if Putrajaya refused the state's request to step in and resolve an impasse over future water supply.

On July 14, Syabas presented the Malaysian National Water Services Commission (SPAN) with a water-rationing plan that will affect the Klang Valley, particularly Kuala Lumpur, Hulu Langat and Klang.

In its weekly report available on its website, Syabas recorded on July 5 that the average demand for water was 4,324.79 million litres a day (MLD) with clean water reserve being at 46.21 MLD, or 1.6 per cent — far below the recommended reserve of 20 per cent.

The utility provider also stated in June that the water shortage was caused by a lack of rain, contamination of rivers and scheduled maintenance work at water treatment plants.

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