

**Pakatan: Syabas in political conspiracy with BN**  
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**By Clara Chooi**

SHAH ALAM, July 23 — A group of 200 protesters led by Pakatan Rakyat (PR) lawmakers demonstrated today against Syabas' proposed water rationing plan, accusing the state water concessionaire of "political sabotage" ahead of the coming general election.

The protesters, who included members of civil society groups, claimed that Syabas' purported refusal to hand over its operations to the Selangor PR government could turn into a security issue in the country's richest state.

"I am confident that we all know this entire issue has been politicised. It has been used to create a sense of dissatisfaction with the PR state government," Shah Alam MP Khalid Samad said in his speech during the protest outside Wisma Rozali here.

He pointed out that although Selangor's seven dams were overflowing with raw water, Syabas' inefficiency in handling water treatment operations had caused the reported water shortage.

The PAS leader repeated the state's objection to the federal government's plans to construct the multibillion ringgit Langat 2 treatment plant, warning that this would result in a hike in Selangor's water tariffs.

"We reject the Langat 2 project... it will merely squander taxpayers' funds to fill Umno's election war chest," he said.

Wanita PKR chief Zuraida Kamaruddin, who was also at the protest, urged Syabas executive chairman Tan Sri Rozali Ismail not to "play politics" at the expense of Selangor folk.

She repeated PR's claim that Rozali, who is also Selangor Umno treasurer and Malaysia's 31st richest man according to Forbes, has been earning a monthly salary of nearly RM500,000

"We want the Syabas management fired and replaced with more efficient people," she said.

Puncak Niaga, which operates the vast majority of Selangor's water treatment plants — 29 out of 34 — is about 40 per cent owned by Rozali.

Puncak Niaga in turn owns 70 per cent of Syabas, with the Selangor government holding the remaining 30 per cent, giving the Umno leader significant control over the treatment and distribution of water in the PR-governed state.

The protesters later handed over five memorandums to Syabas executive director Ismail Hashim, demanding the water concessionaire call off its water rationing plan and surrender its operations to the Selangor government.

Residents of Selangor and the nation's capital Kuala Lumpur got a rude shock recently when Syabas, the state's sole water distribution company, said it may have to start water rationing due to near zero reserves at the state's water treatment plants.

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.

But 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.

The Malaysian Insider reported yesterday that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak may announce Parliament’s dissolution next month while polls may be held before he tables Budget 2013 on September 28.

Last Monday, Selangor Mentri Besar Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim announced that Selangor would invoke clause 32 of the concession agreement with Syabas to take over operations of the water supplier, accusing the company of being incompetent for failing to lower non-revenue water (NRW) to below 20 per cent and owing RM2.8 billion in arrears.

Syabas refuted these claims, stating that it had informed the state government of the dire situation and blamed the freeze on its capex for its inability to function up to standard.

On Thursday, Energy, Green Technology and Water Minister Datuk Seri Peter Chin announced the formation of a special Cabinet committee, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin himself and consisting of various ministers who are also Umno state and Federal Territory leaders.

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