

No more dry taps, Najib promises Selangor
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By Boo Su-Lyn

SHAH ALAM, April 22 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak guaranteed today that Selangor will never experience water supply interruptions again.

The caretaker prime minister said during his campaign in the country's wealthiest state, ahead of the May 5 polls, that the Pakatan Rakyat (PR) state government prioritised its takeovers of water concessionaires, instead of resolving the water supply problems.

"I guarantee, as the Selangor Barisan Nasional (BN) chairman, that our focus will be on ensuring continuous water supply," Najib told a cheering crowd at Taman Sri Muda here today.

"If Selangor is under the opposition and the federal government is under Barisan Nasional, many issues will arise. The biggest problem is the water issue," he added.

Water supply outages had hit Gombak, Hulu Langat and Kuala Lumpur in March after two treatment plants were affected by heavy rains.

Caretaker Selangor menteri besar Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim said in January that the state government will proceed to take over the water concessionaires in a bid to resolve the supply issues.

Selangor has steadfastly opposed the federal government's Langat 2 water treatment plant project, citing the high costs involved that it said would force the state to increase the tariffs for water and renege on its pledge to provide the utility cheaply, a policy PR had introduced after winning power in Election 2008.

To facilitate the process, Selangor had first mooted the takeover in 2009, offering to buy Syarikat Bekalan Air Selangor Sdn Bhd (SYABAS), Puncak Niaga Sdn Bhd (PNSB), Syarikat Pengeluaran Air Sungai Selangor Sdn Bhd (SPLASH) and Konsortium ABASS at RM5.7 billion. The offer was rejected.

In February, English language daily The Star reported Khalid as offering RM9.65 billion to take over all four water companies and to absorb their liabilities.

The tussle for control of treated water supply in the country's most developed state has become major vote fodder in Election 2013, after SYABAS warned Malaysians of a possible crisis in the near future due to near-zero reserve capacity at the state's water treatment plants.

The protracted battle for the control of water resources in Selangor has thrown the spotlight on how much money is at stake in the strategic industry, making it a potential example of Mahathir-era privatisation gone wrong.

It could also sway voters in the heated battle for both Selangor and Kuala Lumpur.

PR won Selangor and 10 out of 11 parliamentary seats in the Federal Territory in the historic Election 2008 that saw BN lose its two-thirds parliamentary majority.

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