

Consumer groups slam Putrajaya, Selangor for delaying water agreement
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Fearing a water crisis, groups representing the water and consumer groups have told Putrajaya and Selangor to stop the politics over the state's water restructuring deal and ensure that ratepayers have access to continuous and safe drinking water supply.

"We are tired of all this nonsense," three groups said in a joint statement today, following Selangor's announcement yesterday that the restructuring deal was off because Putrajaya had wanted to take over land in the state for water pipes.

The groups are the Water and Energy Consumer Association (Wecam), the Federation Of Malaysian Consumer Associations (Fomca) and Forum Air Malaysia.

"Both governments have been working relentlessly for seven years in order to complete the water industry restructuring plan in Selangor and now we are back to square one.

"This basic right (to continuous and safe drinking water) should not be treated as a bargaining chip for political mileage with the expense of the people in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur," they said.

The groups also questioned why Putrajaya had kept asking for an extension to complete the water deal.

The master agreement on the restructuring deal signed by former menteri besar Tan Sri Abdul Khalid Ibrahim in September last year was to have been finalised on January 12 this year, but was postponed to February 9 and given a third extension to March 9, yesterday.

Azmin earlier today said had Selangor agreed to the deal, it would mean giving up the state's sovereignty over its land, as Putrajaya had asked for the land for water pipes to be given over for free. Azmin said this request had not been part of the master agreement.

But this afternoon, Azmin appeared to soften, saying that Selangor was open to discussing plans for Putrajaya to lease the land.

Some 26,000 km of pipes are among the assets listed in the agreement, which will see Selangor taking over the operations of the state's water industry from four private companies through a state special purpose vehicle called Pengurusan Air Selangor Sdn Bhd.

"We are demanding both the state and federal government to stop pointing fingers

and return to the negotiation table as soon as possible and complete the restructuring of the water industry in Selangor by this year," said the three groups.

"Time is running short as the water levels at the dams are dropping again and if the Langat 2 Water Treatment Plant is not completed on time, water crisis will become the new norm in the richest and most modern state in Malaysia in the near future."

Meanwhile, the Selangor Barisan Nasional opposition said Azmin, as a new menteri besar, did not understand land issues.

Selangor Umno liaison chairman Datuk Seri Noh Omar said "any project will involve land transfers" and Azmin, who had only been menteri besar for just under six months, should not compromise the people's interest by rejecting the water restructuring agreement.

"We want to remind him not to play politics on issues that affect the people," Noh, the Tanjong Karang MP, told reporters in Parliament today.

He said that under the Pakatan Rakyat Selangor government, the state had seen a drop in foreign direct investment from RM9 billion in 2008 to RM3.2 billion in 2014.

Job opportunities in the state have also dropped by half from 30,000 to 15,000 in the same period, Noh added. – March 10, 2015.

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