

Water waste of water

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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia lost an estimated RM1.64 billion worth of treated water in 2009 due to wastage - a sum 6.5 times higher than the developmental funds allocated to all schools nationwide in the 2011 Budget. The volume lost could fill up 720,000 Olympic-size swimming pools.

The Association of Water and Energy Research Malaysia (AWER) revealed the figure to the New Sunday Times recently following a study on financial loss caused by non-revenue water (NRW) in the country.

NRW is water that is produced and lost -- through leakage, theft or metering errors -- before it reaches consumers.

A leakage occurs when heavy vehicles go over roads that are not designed to take the extra load, thus fracturing underground pipes, said association president Piarapakaran Subramaniam.

"Pipe leakage also affects the quality of water. If the pressure in the pipe is lower, you have liquids flowing in from the soil. That's why in some locations, people get murky water smelling of soil. There's a risk of contamination.

"To maintain pressure, operators pump more water to keep up and that's where you have even more water leaking out and higher NRW."

According to the Malaysia Water Industry Guide 2010, the average NRW recorded in 2009 was 36.63 per cent compared with 36.93 per cent in 2008.

The volume of treated water loss was about 1.8 billion cubic metres in 2009. Such a loss has never been assigned a price tag until now.

Using the lowest water tariffs, the association calculated how much that volume would cost and reached the conservative figure of RM1.64 billion.

In comparison, the total revenue for the water services sector was RM3.93 billion that year -- made from supply which was successfully delivered to homes and industries.

Piarapakaran said if NRW could be reduced, surplus in the water services industry could be increased to a much more sustainable level.

"Water wastage is factored into the tariff through raw water purchase, treatment cost and electricity usage."

The guide also identified Pahang as having the highest percentage of NRW in 2009 at 59.9 per cent, where the total treated water loss was about 200 million cubic metres.

However, Selangor -- including Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya -- registered the highest loss in cubic metre.

NRW in the state was 465 million cubic metres, even though its NRW percentage stood at 32.5 per cent. This is due to Selangor having the highest production volume of treated water in Malaysia.

Although the total NRW was reduced by 0.3 per cent between 2008 and 2009, a financial loss of RM20 million was still registered due to increase in distribution costs.

AWER urged the Ministry of Energy, Green Technology and Water, and the National Water Services Commission to form a special task force to focus on keeping the national NRW below 20 per cent by 2020.

It also suggested that NRW be made a leading key performance index to determine tariff adjustment for future tariff setting process.

"Reductions in NRW will reduce the water treatment and supply cost, where it will directly assist to achieve an equitable tariff for Malaysians," said Piarapakaran.

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