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Natural resources: Water sector needs unification

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THE assurance given by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak in tackling water-related issues is a very important milestone in Malaysian history. Water is national security and our failure will lead to both raw water security and supply security problems.

One of the main issues Water and Energy Research Malaysia (AWER) has observed is that the management of water throughout the usage cycle is still segregated. Many agencies are involved and integrated efforts are not in place. Climate change impacts water sources directly, but the divided water management structurally causes more damage than the climate change can. This was clearly pointed out by the Prime Minister in his recent speech during Malaysia's World Water Day celebration.

The water sector actually operates in a closed loop system. The raw water we consume is from the environment. We treat and supply it to all levels of consumers and finally produce wastewater. This wastewater needs to be treated before being discharged into the environment again. For this model to function the environment must be able to sustain our polluting and demand parameters. This is because the environment as a whole has limited carrying capacity.

The closed loop system like this is beneficial to policy makers and consumers as we will not be detached from it. However, our failure to be efficient will cause major crisis such as water shortage, pollution and high water tariff.

One of the first steps is to unify the water related agencies under one ministry. AWER would like to suggest that all water related agencies be unified under the Energy, Green Technology and Water Ministry at Federal level. This will first unify the coordination at Federal level and engage State governments effectively.

Water is a precious gift; it is how we manage it that can differentiate Malaysia for other countries.

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