

'Johor dam plan needs feasibility study first'

JOHOR BARU: Any proposal for a hydroelectric dam in Sungai Johor should be preceded by a two-year feasibility study to look into environmental and human elements involved in such a project.

Johor Malaysian Nature Society chairman Vincent Chow said if the state government wanted to stabilise water reserves in Sungai Johor, it would be better if it improved water catchment areas, some of which were affected by agricultural activities.

"With the idea of a hydroelectric dam, a feasibility study should be conducted. The location of the project is an important aspect, and the people who will be affected by it."

The *New Straits Times* reported that the Johor government was looking into a proposal to build the first hydroelectric dam in the state in Sungai Johor.

State Public Works, Rural and Regional Development Committee chairman Datuk Hasni Mohammad said a few companies were interested in the project, after it was revealed by Sultan of Johor Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar that the proposal could solve the state's water supply woes.

About 65 per cent of the state's water supply comes from Sungai Johor.

A dry spell since June caused water levels in two dams in the state to dip below the critical level, and led to water rationing in three dis-

tricts for three months.

Chow said the problem with the state's water supply was related to encroachment of water catchment areas, as it affected the natural cycle of water.

"There are water catchment areas with oil palms trees. This crop absorbs 40 litres of water from the ground per day.

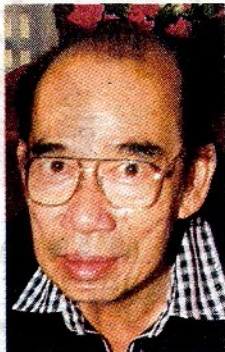
"In water catchment areas near Jalan Paloh-Kluang, the crops are planted right up to the embankment of Sungai Sembrong. We are suffering with this water shortage due to our past mistakes and greed," said Chow.

Association of Water and Energy Research Malaysia president, S. Piarapakaran said he foresaw a problem in finding suitable locations for hydroelectric dams in the peninsula.

Chow and Piarapakaran said it would be cost-effective to convert dams to have hydroelectricity capabilities, or expand dams to boost water reserves.

"Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi recently approved a suggestion under the Natural Water Resource Plan for existing dams in Negri Sembilan, Pahang and Perak to be upgraded to have flood mitigation functions.

"We should look into upgrading existing dams to expand their capacity and to generate power," Piarapakaran said.



Vincent Chow