

Sarawak water projects get green light

Approved ventures will cost RM3.54bil

KUCHING: A quarter of the Sarawak government's projects to supply water in rural areas has been approved under the five-year 11th Malaysia Plan (11MP).

Second Resource Planning and Environment Minister Datuk Amar Awang Tengah Ali Hasan said the state submitted plans for 795 projects, which will benefit 79,130 households, and 218 were approved so far.

The approved projects would cost a total of RM3.54bil, he said during the opening of the new Rural Water Supply Department headquarters here yesterday.

He said the ministry would ask for more funding during the mid-term review of the 11MP or before the next rolling plan.

The demand for water had jumped dramatically over the years due to the increasing population and stretching of existing water supplies, he said.

In the last five years, the rural population has gone from 788,000 to 1.25 million while supply pipelines have grown from about 4,400km to 6,700km.

"The number of water treatment plants has also increased from 76 to 90," Awang Tengah said.

He said the responsibility of supplying water was becoming more challenging due to the rapid development in Sarawak.

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Datuk Amar Awang Tengah Ali Hasan

"There is a pressing need to develop our resources and the supply system to rural areas," he said, adding it was really "an enormous responsibility".

He spoke about the possibility of a master water pipeline or grid, similar to the electricity distribution network.

He said the setting up of the Rural Water Supply Department, which used to be a unit within the state Public Works Department, was first mooted in 2007 and approved by the Sarawak Cabinet in August last year.

It is responsible for the planning, design and development of raw water resources and supply systems in the state.

The department also managed, controlled and operated waterworks under its jurisdiction and supplied potable water to rural folk, added its director Daniel Wong.