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Conflicting statements over Kedah raw water sale

WATER SPAT: Is it a political ploy to divert attention from bigger issues?

ISSUING conflicting statements seems to be the order of the day for Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Azizan Abdul Razak and his Penang counterpart Lim Guan Eng.

Azizan had announced that Kedah would soon charge Penang for raw water it obtains mostly from Sungai Muda, which marks the border between Kedah and the Seberang Perai side of Penang.

He had also announced that discussions at the officers' level had been held between the two states and that he was adamant Penang should start paying for raw water from next year.

However, Lim had said that there were never such discussions and that he was equally resistant to the idea of Penang having to pay for untreated water which the state had traditionally been getting from the river.

Penang Water Supply Corporation general manager Jaseni Maidinsa had also said he had no knowledge of any discussion on the Kedah proposal.

On his part, Azizan and his state executive councillors insisted that such discussions between the water authorities of the two states had been held, and that soon a state-level meeting would be organised.

Lim, on the other hand, has denied any such talks at the officers' level and said his DAP-led state government was not going to entertain any state-level talks.

In short, Lim is saying Kedah can forget the idea.

The undeterred Azizan, also known for being a *chengey* (a slang term in the Kedah Malay dialect which means fierce), plans to send his emis-

sary, Datuk Phahrolrazi Zawawi, to the proposed state-level talks.

Phahrolrazi, who had led a futile attempt to oust Azizan as menteri besar early this year, had said that Kedah would even engage federal assistance, if necessary, to make Penang pay for the raw water supply.

And Phahrolrazi, when contacted, said officers from the Kedah Water Resources Authority, the regulatory agency for the state's water management, had in fact held discussions with their Penang counterparts. However, he did not provide details on the discussions.

To Kedah Gerakan Youth chief Tan Keng Liang, Azizan is simply a desperate man.

After forcing the people of Kedah to dig deeper into their pockets to pay for a 100 per cent water tariff hike two years ago, he said the Pas-led state government was still not resourceful about boosting the state coffers.

Tan said Kedah Pas, devoid of ideas to fill the state coffers, had also denied Universiti Utara Malaysia a rebate on its quit rent.

"What else is there for the Pas-led state government to do?" he asks.

"After shortchanging the people and failing to come up with new economic and substantial economic opportunities, it is now turning

to its neighbour, also a Pakatan Rakyat state, for help," he said.

A vocal critic of Azizan and his Pakatan Rakyat state government, Tan said Azizan was counting on Penang to help fund Kedah's development programmes.

"It's free water but he wants Penang to pay for it," he said. "I wonder what is next up Azizan's sleeves."

"Maybe he would resort to demanding Penang pay Kedah RM10,000 royalty since the state once belonged to the Kedah royal family."

Despite the conflicting statements, Tan did not rule out that the raw water spat was a mere diversion, plotted by the two Pakatan Rakyat partners, from the bigger

issues affecting the opposition alliance, namely over Pas' hudud plans and Parti Keadilan Rakyat vice-president Nurul Izzah's controversial stance on religious freedom.

"The spat may come to naught. Pas and DAP are merely trying to divert the attention of the people from Nurul Izzah's blatant and irresponsible statement on religious freedom," he said.

"However, the people know better. Kedah Pas has failed them. No amount of *main wayang* can fool them any more."

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Lim Guan Eng has denied there were any **discussions** between the water authorities of Penang and Kedah

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Datuk Seri Azizan Abdul Razak claims that a ***state-level meeting*** over the ***sale of raw water*** to Penang will soon be organised