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Sabah takes over RM4b water projects

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KOTA KINABALU: The transfer of authority for 83 Rural Water Supply (BALB) projects worth RM4.06 billion from the federal to the Sabah state government is expected to cut bureaucracy, especially regarding technical and financial approvals.

Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) Geopolitics and Electoral Studies Centre (GeoPES) Assoc Prof and researcher Dr Syahrudin Awang Ahmad said the large allocation allows agencies like the Sabah State Water Department to manage tenders and monitor site work independently and more quickly.

He added that this decentralisation places responsibility and accountability on the state government, testing its capability following the recent state election.

"Any implementation failure will thus be seen as a weakness of state-level domestic management, while the federal government will be held less accountable in the public eye.

"Still, some parties will likely blame both governments if coordination isn't as smooth as promised," he told Bernama.

On April 16, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, who is also Minister of Rural and Regional Development, said the authority to implement 83 BALB projects worth RM4.06 billion in Sabah was handed over to the state government to speed up completion.

However, Syahrudin stressed that faster administration alone will not fully resolve the water crisis long plaguing the state's residents, which needs a more comprehensive solution.

"Absolute resolution still depends on governance efficiency, contractor quality and the agency's ability to tackle

complex technical issues like Sabah's current Non-Revenue Water (NRW) rates," he said.

To ensure smooth execution, he strongly hopes the state government will implement a strict monitoring system to prevent cronyism in contract awards.

"This handover is a major test for state leadership to prove its capability. If successful, I believe it will set a new benchmark for federal-state relations, in line with MA63," he added.

Meanwhile, UMS political analyst Dr Romzi Ationg said the federal government's decision to hand over project authority closely aligns with public aspirations.

"This initiative brings great hope to Sabahans, who want the long-standing water crisis resolved quickly through more efficient state-level action," he said.

However, he noted the state government now holds primary responsibility, and the public cannot assign blame without deeper scrutiny.

UMNO Sabah Liaison secretary Samasuddin Yusop called the transfer of authority a strategic step that will accelerate resolving Sabah's water crisis, especially in rural areas.

"This power transfer aligns with MA63 and enables faster, more targeted state decisions based on local geography, without waiting for central processes," he said.

Grateful for the federal government's trust, Samasuddin emphasised that the focus should be on efficient, transparent implementation. The party, he added, will support the move to ensure the people benefit without delays or leakages. - Bernama



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SUMMARIES

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