

## 20pc water tariff increase not fixed, minister assures Malaysians

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*Dr Xavier also gave an assurance that any increase will not burden the public. — Picture by Azinuddin Ghazali*

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 16 — Dr Xavier Jayakumar today said the government has not decided on a proposed 20 per cent ceiling cap in the much talked-about water tariff rate hike.

The water, land and natural resources minister said many states are in favour of an increase, but the National Water Services Commission (SPAN) is still in talks with each state.

He also gave an assurance that the increase will not burden the public.

“There are methods on increasing the water price,” Dr Xavier told a news conference here.

“We are discussing the matter and if 20 per cent water hike is too high, we can discuss to lower it,” he replied when asked about Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP) chairman Chow Kon Yeow’s proposal of a 20 per cent hike for the state.

Asked if the hike will be capped at 20 per cent, the minister said the quantum is still being discussed and negotiated by SPAN with the various state governments.

However, he is hopeful the matter will be resolved this year.

Dr Xavier said his ministry is also studying how to increase the quality of potable water in light of the criticisms that the increase is not fair due to the low quality found in Malaysia tap water.

Earlier this month, Dr Xavier announced that water tariff may be increased in stages this year in line with the government’s efforts to restructure the water supply services industry in the country.

On a related matter, he said the joint billing for waste water and treated water pilot project in Labuan was a success.

Dr Xavier said the collection under Indah Water Konsortium (IWK) has increased to 93 per cent from 40 per cent since the project was initiated in late 2016.

“We have a success story in Labuan on the joint billing with IWK. We can see IWK’s collection in Labuan has increased to 93 per cent from 40 per cent and the public has no problem paying both bills at the same time.

“We need to understand why there is a joint billing. IWK is having difficulty in collecting and they don’t have enough for maintenance work. The ministry subsidises IWK at RM150 million annually. This is part of the ministry’s budget but we can’t continue supporting them at this level,” he explained.

Dr Xavier, who is also Kuala Langat MP, said the IWK problem must have a resolution. He hopes to expand the joint billing initiative to other states where IWK operates.