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## Treated water blow for Sabah rural folks

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### Abbey Junior

KUALA LUMPUR: Sabah's rural communities face a growing crisis of inadequate access to essential services such as treated water and renewable energy, Datuk Ir.



Shahelmei Yahya (Putatan) said in the Dewan Rakyat on Tuesday.

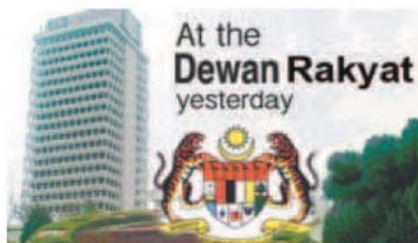
Raising the alarm during the debate on the 2025 Supply Bill, Shahelmei who is also Sabah Minister of Works highlighted the stark disparities in treated water coverage between urban and rural areas of Sabah.

According to the National Audit Report 2024 Series 2, only 61 per cent of rural Sabah has access to treated water, compared to full coverage in urban areas.

He attributed this to a lack of proper distribution infrastructure and outdated facilities, describing the situation as an urgent humanitarian issue.

"This is not acceptable. Our rural communities are being denied a fundamental right to clean water. Petra must act now by investing in modern, high-capacity water treatment plants to serve these underserved areas," he said.

Shahelmei also highlighted the environmental risks stemming from inadequate sludge treatment facilities in the state. Out of Sabah's 85 water treatment



plants, only 31 are equipped with the necessary facilities to handle sludge.

Places like Moyog Treatment Plant Residual Lagoon, where untreated sludge is discharged directly into water channels, cause significant environmental harm.

"We must address the lack of sludge treatment facilities immediately. This is not just about improving water quality but also preventing long-term environmental damage. The situation at the Moyog Lagoon is a clear example of what happens when these facilities are not in place," he added.

Shahelmei called for greater collaboration between Petra and the Sabah State Water Department (JANS), urging them to allocate significant financial resources to restructure and upgrade existing facilities.

He stressed that with treated water demand projected to reach 1.974 billion litres per day by 2030, action must begin immediately to meet future needs.

Turning his attention to energy transition, Shahelmei commended initiatives

like the Solar for Rakyat Incentive Scheme (SolaRIS), which offers rebates of up to RM4,000 for new solar users under the Net Energy Metering (NEM) programme.

However, he stressed the need for further measures to ensure renewable energy benefits all Sabahans, particularly those in the B40 income group.

"We are still far from achieving equitable energy access. Many Sabahans continue to suffer from inconsistent electricity supply, and renewable energy must not be limited to those with higher incomes. Petra must take immediate action to implement programmes like 'Solar For All' to include low-income households," he said.

Shahelmei demanded clarity on the NEM rebate programme, posing several questions: "How many people from Sabah have applied for the NEM rebate as of October 31, 2024? What are the specific evaluation criteria that TNB and Sabah Electricity use to approve these applications? Are they prioritising low-income households, or is the process biased toward other groups?"

He also urged Petra to ensure that starting in 2025, new incentives would allow lower-income families to adopt solar energy without facing recurring costs.

"Sabah cannot afford to wait any longer. Our communities deserve better access to both clean water and renewable energy. This is not just about development; this is about justice," he added.